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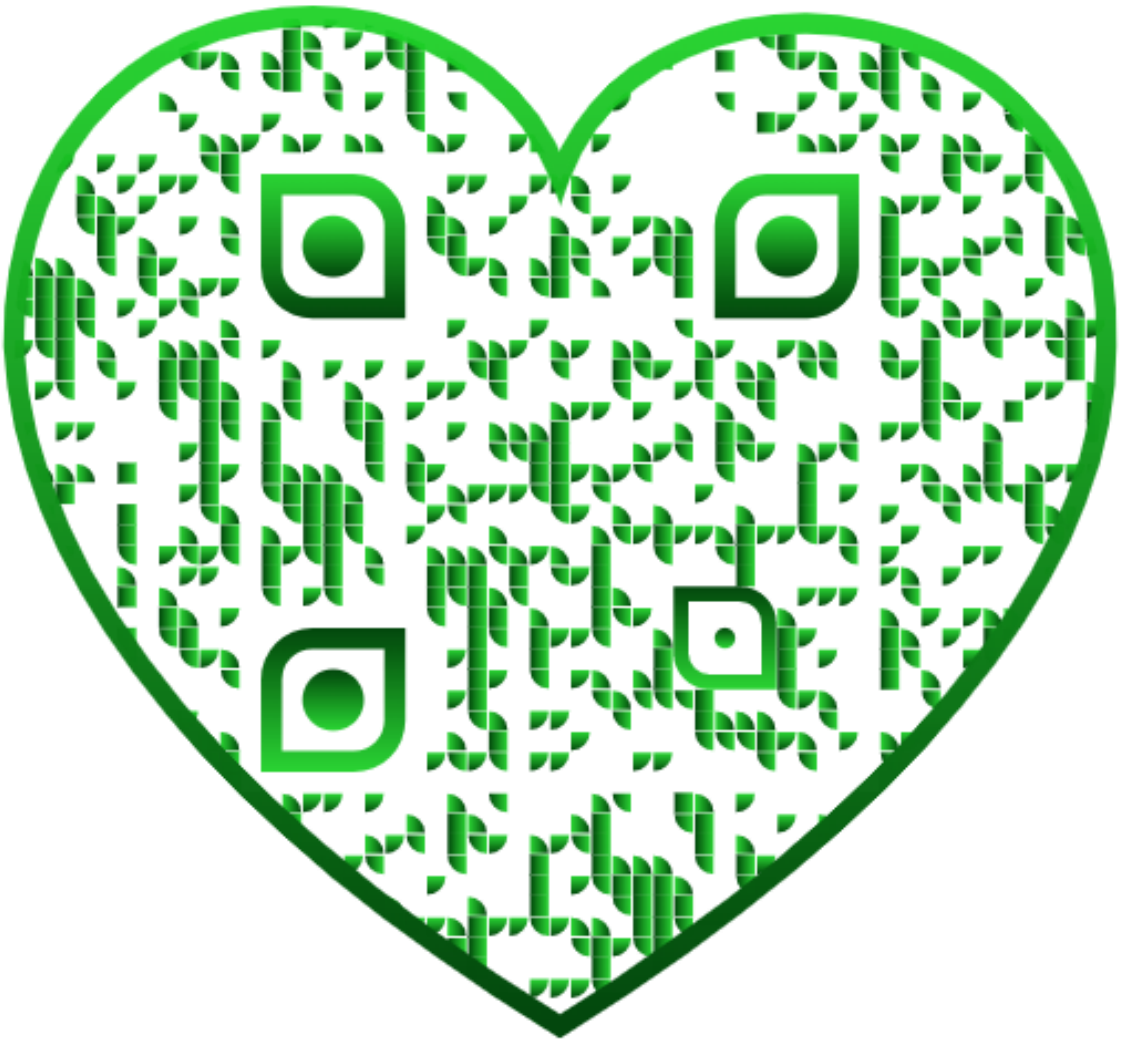

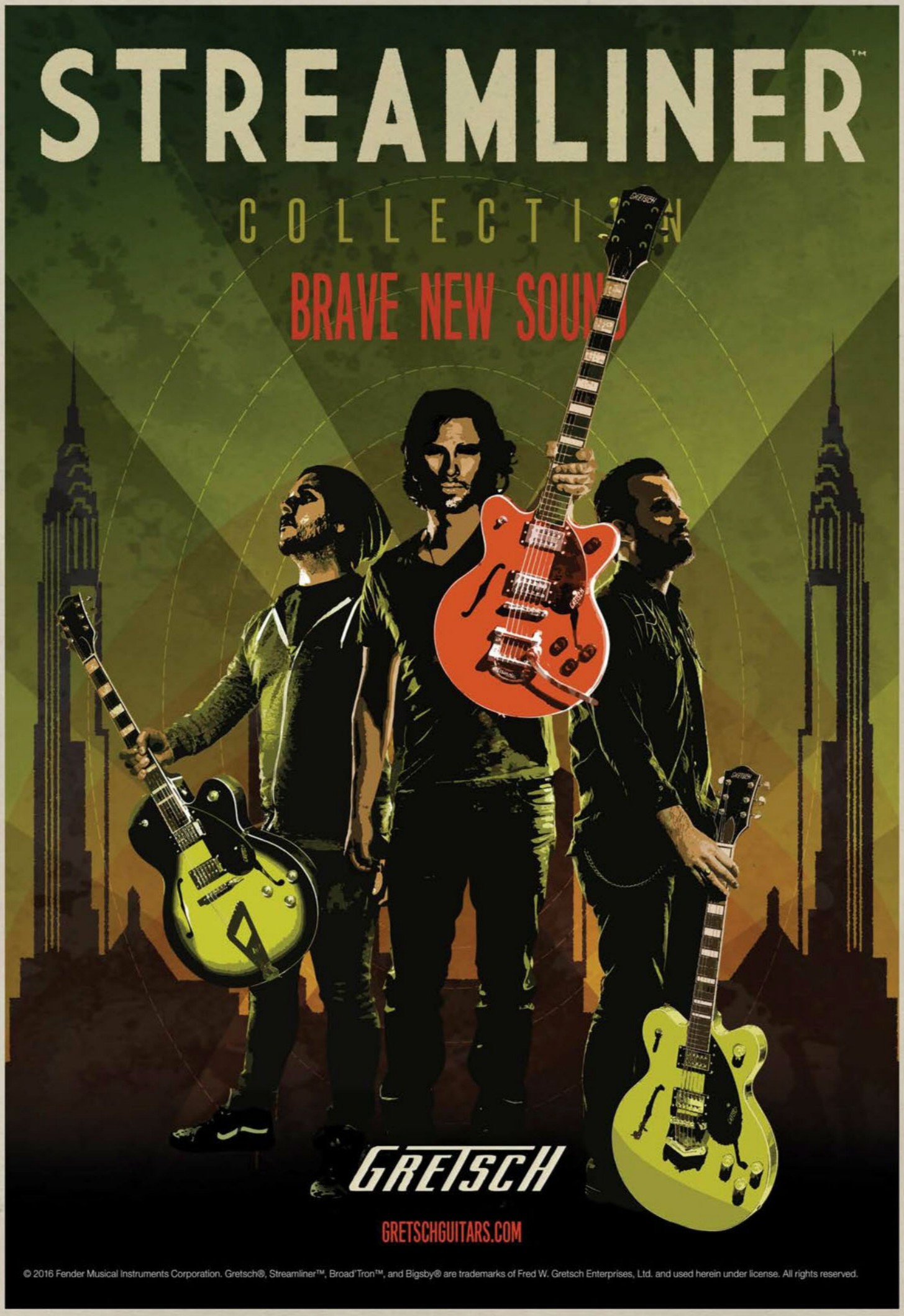

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Guitar & Bass

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Tel **+44 (0) 1582 678 900**

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
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Cultural exchange

I've spent a fair bit of time in the States for work and play of late, and spoken to numerous American musicians on my travels – not least this month's cover star. Recently, during a rare break from the state of barely-contained panic in which I tend to find myself at 36,000ft, I began to think about the decades of transatlantic cross-pollination that are woven into the very fabric of what we do.

The early blues, R&B and rock 'n' roll pioneers gave the Brit beat groups their vocabulary, then the British Invasion of the US charts and the electric blues boom that grew out of clubs in swinging London rewrote the rules and gave it right back, inspiring a whole new generation of American musicians to pick up guitars in the process.

When it came to the gear that gave voice to all of this delicious angst and rebellion, it was a similar story of exchange, with American players craving hot Marshall tones that had more than a little Fender in their DNA. And for us Brits, the magnetic allure of an American guitar – for a while almost unobtainable – is arguably as formidable today as it ever was. Many of the current generation of US boutique amp designers are still chasing 'the British sound', while plenty of UK builders look to American circuits that are almost 70 years old for inspiration. We're in a unique industry for sure, and long may the symbiosis continue...

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In this issue...

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

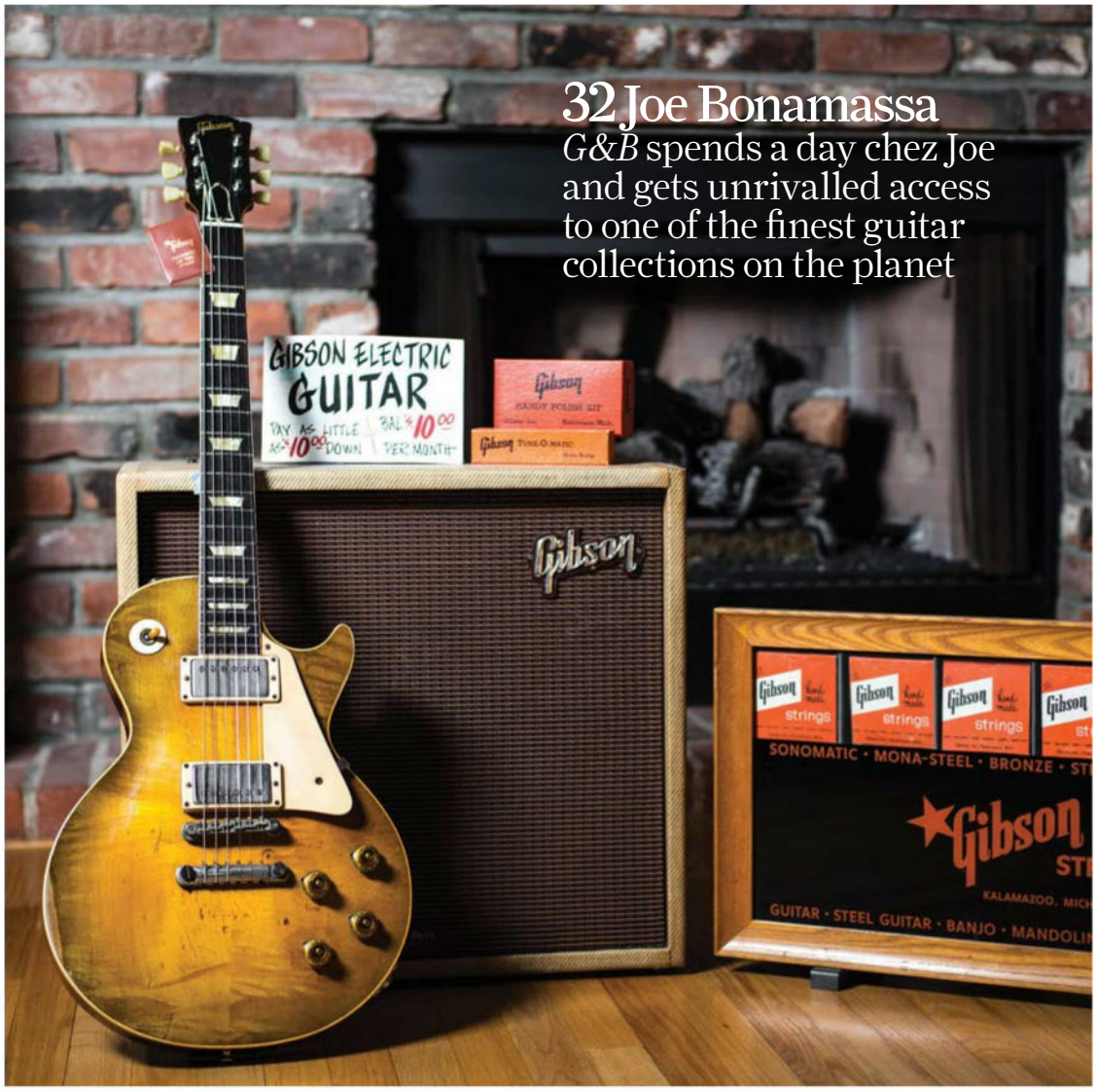
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.



32 Joe Bonamassa

G&B spends a day chez Joe and gets unrivalled access to one of the finest guitar collections on the planet

12 NAMM

THE BEST NEW GEAR FROM THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE GUITAR INDUSTRY'S CALENDAR

COVER STORY

At home with Joe Bonamassa 32
Joe Bonamassa invites *G&B* into his California home to get up close and personal with the stunning vintage guitars that shaped his new album

FEATURES

NAMM: The Top 25 12
We bring you the pick of the new gear unveiled at this year's NAMM Show in Anaheim, California

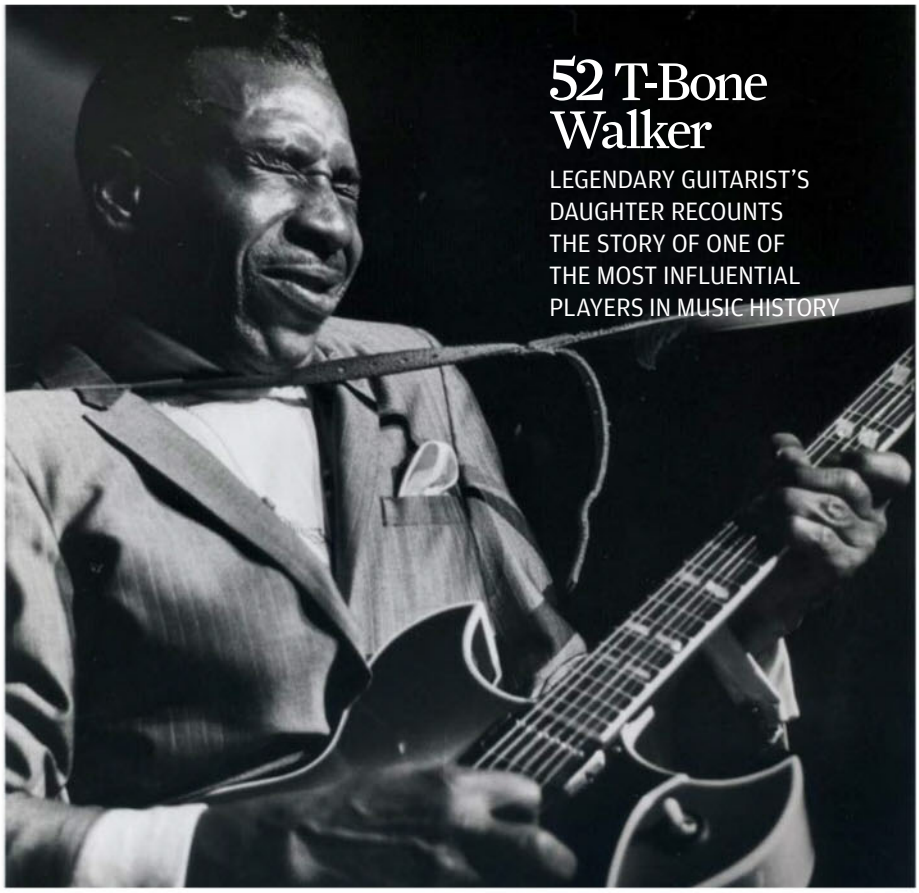
Huey Morgan 22
Fun Lovin' Criminals man selects his favourite records

John Petrucci 44
Dream Theater guitarist tells the story behind the band's ambitious new concept album

T-Bone Walker 52
One of the greatest ever guitar players profiled

Chris Robertson 130
Black Stone Cherry guitarist speaks to *G&B*

REGULARS OPENING BARS Ones To Watch & win five Valeton pedals 6 LETTERS FROM AMERICA 8 READER BOARDS 20 SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE 22



52 T-Bone Walker

LEGENDARY GUITARIST'S DAUGHTER RECOUNTS THE STORY OF ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PLAYERS IN MUSIC HISTORY

GEAR REVIEWS

John Page Classic Ashburn 60
Echopark Model J 64
Supro 164 2RT Titan 68
Tone King Falcon Grande 72
Award-Session Bluesbaby 78
Rift PT20 & Plexi 18 82
Yerasov Blackspace & Gavrosh 10 86
Hudson Electronics Broadcast & Sidecar 90
Fender Paramount PM-2 Deluxe & PM-3 Standard 92
Italia Maranello Z 94
Hawk Picks & TC Electronic Ditto X4 Looper 97

WORKSHOPS

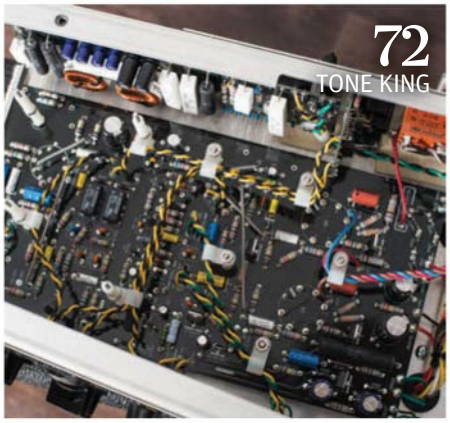
Gretsch conversion part one 25
Huw Price gets started on a project to turn a battered old Gretsch Anniversary into a 50s-style 6120

All about... Telecaster bridge pickups 120
An unmistakable, iconic guitar sound explained

Chord clinic 122
Beef up your playing as Rod Fogg introduces powerchords

64 ECHOPARK

68 SUPRO



72 TONE KING

90 HUDSON

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ONES TO WATCH

Poly-Math

MATH-ROCKERS WITH A TASTE FOR ART

A last-minute booking for the ArcTanGent festival in 2013 was a turning point for Brighton three-piece Poly-Math. Only six months into the band's existance, having started out as a side-project from guitarist Tim Walters' then-main band Monsters Build Mean Robots, and with no real recorded material under their belts, the call from the world's primary post- and math-rock festival was a surprising one.

"We were lucky to be asked to fill in at ArcTanGent, we'd barely released a thing at the time," Walters tells *G&B*. "That show propelled us forward, we ended up playing to a completely packed tent and selling out of merchandise. From that point, we dealt with the band much more seriously. The band has developed a lot in that time as well, not least due to our unhealthy addiction to purchasing new gear. At this point, we probably tour more gear than your average five-piece."

Poly-Math have a mini-album, entitled *Melencolia*, set for release on April 8. Recorded in just four days, it's a piece of work inspired by other forms of art.

"Our formula is unique in that we write in movements rather than songs," says Walters. "As we're instrumental and don't have the vocal element to guide the mood or meaning of our music, we tend to choose topics and decide on a progression through that topic. For *Melencolia*, we've titled and based the mood of each track on an artist and their work. We focused on three lithographs by Albrecht Dürer. It's nice to have something to focus on that can guide you through the writing process – being instrumental can be a little directionless otherwise.

"We recorded at Brighton Electric Studios over four days and had the album produced back in Ireland at Start Together Studio. The whole process involved more guitar tracks, effect pedals, amp heads and tying guitars to kick drums than I've experienced in my life. I don't think we could be happier with the result."

Despite their post-rock associations, Walters sees Poly-Math as being influenced more by 70s prog acts than typical bands from the former genre.

"I don't think we've ever thought of ourselves as post-rock exactly," he says. "Our influences are very grounded in prog and the progressive rock movement of the 70s. Bands like King Crimson, Yes, Camel and Caravan are probably the heaviest influences on our direction, and obviously The Mars Volta played a big part in introducing that to us and our generation."

Walters' gear journey has been guided by the fact that he's a left-handed player using right-handed guitars. "My dad was a left-handed guitarist who strung upside-down," he says. "I think I just took guitar up in that fashion because it was how he played. I play my dad's custom-built 60s Burns Duo-Sonic, which is left-handed but strung upside-down, and I've played a few left-handed Japanese Fender Telecasters with the same reverse-strung bridge. I think it encourages a more unusual approach, and I tune quite differently – often E standard with the bass string dropped to a low B, or in Fripp's new standard 5ths tuning.

"As an upside-down lefty, I was massively influenced by Hendrix; everything he did was groundbreaking, he was constantly looking to reinvent the sound of guitar. In fact, three of my four biggest influences are left-handed players. Robert Fripp, who played right-handed, but was left-handed, is also a huge influence – I love his awkward atonal jagged riffs.

"Jonny Greenwood was a huge inspiration, he taught me all the tricks of atonality, and really got me started down this path. Omar Rodriguez-López is probably the most interesting guitarist I've ever heard. He tries to make his guitar sound as little like a guitar as possible. I loved that ethic, and I think it's probably led to the 25-plus pedalboard that I now lug around."

Walters' current setup is a complicated one: "I'm playing an early-80s Japanese '62 reissue bound Fender

Telecaster, one of the early empress wood models," he explains. "I use a double-amp setup; one for my standard sound and one for a high-gain sub-octave, which I punch in and out with an ABY.

"The main amp is an old Orange Rocker 30 running into an Orange PPC212, and the sub amp is a very rare Hovercraft Dwarvenaut 25 in green tolex into another Orange PPC212. From there, I have two separate pedal chains; the Dwarvenaut simply has a DigiTech Drop running straight into the front end. The Orange receives the bulk of the rest of my board, which has far too many pedals for me to list: a number of pitch shifters, phasers, delays, vibratos and drives. Probably the most interesting is the Poly-Drive; a pedal we co-designed with Third Eye Pedals in Brighton specifically for our sound. The best new addition I have to my board is the new Boss Waza Craft analogue delay." **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *King Crimson, Radiohead*

GEAR *Poly-Math*

- **GUITARS** Japanese '62 reissue bound Fender Telecaster, 60s Burns Duo-Sonic
- **PEDALS** Various pitch shifters, phasers, delays, vibratos and drives, including DigiTech Drop, Third Eye Pedals Poly-Drive & Boss Waza Craft analogue delay
- **AMPLIFIERS** Orange Rocker 30, Orange PPC212, Hovercraft Dwarvenaut 25

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A Lazaro **B** Lazarus **C** Lazaretto

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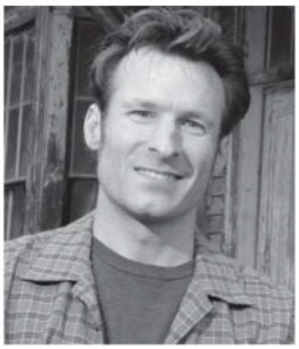
Letters from America

Made in highly limited numbers, Jim Kelley's original Reverb Model is a revered tone machine. **DAVE HUNTER** gives the new version a spin...



DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Park a few gearheads at the bar, get the pints in and start talking about great forgotten valve amps, and the conversation will soon flow around to Jim Kelley. Or, if it doesn't, it certainly should. Between 1979 and 1985, Kelley built his eponymously named heads and combos at the premises of his Active Guitar Electronics outfit in Tustin, California.

The 500 or so examples that came to life in that brief period are remembered by any and all who have enjoyed the opportunity to try one as being robust and superbly toneful creations, usually recalled with a fondness that is afforded to few other amp brands. Although their aesthetics might have borrowed something from the Mesa/Boogie cosmetic blueprint (compact 1x12 combos with front-mounted EVM 12L speakers and hardwood and wicker-grille options for some extra coin), they were nothing at all like those earlier Californian boutique rivals.

Some have even called the Jim Kelley Reverb Model "the other Dumble", and that is probably closer to the mark. Major players such as Lee Ritenour, Mark Knopfler, Allan Holdsworth, Vince Gill, Daryl Stuermer and others seemed to agree with this verdict, and played their Kelley amps through much of the 80s and beyond.

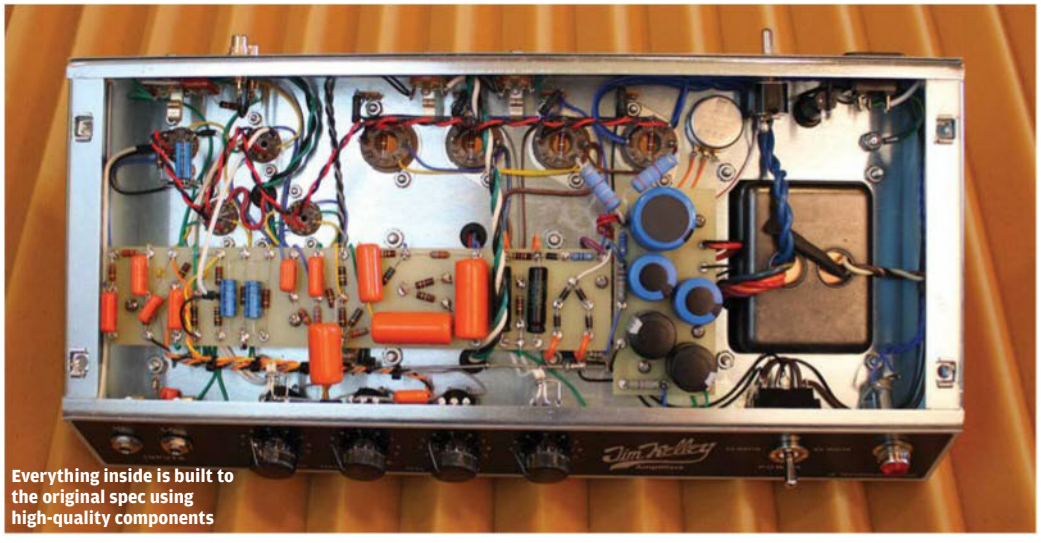
Essentially, the Kelley design tackles beefed-up guitar tone from the opposite end of the spectrum to Boogie's approach. Rather than ramping up a cascading-gain preamp into a stout output stage with a master volume or two to rein it all in, the Reverb Model pumped a simple but elegant preamp and tone stage into a sizzling back end, with no master volume.

The expense is all in the engineering and the top-quality components that do their thing within

The intention was to provide an extremely potent clean machine or a juicy, singing, tactile lead tone with the single gain control rolled up high and the ensuing maelstrom tamped down, when necessary, by Kelley's own Power Attenuator (Kelley's FACS Model – Foot Activated Channel Switching – carried two of the same identical channels to do both, one clean one mean, with the attenuator switching in automatically when the footswitch was used to select the lead channel).

Suffice to say, the venture's demise in 1985 was duly mourned, and a minor cult of sorts has incanted round the altar of Jim Kelley ever since. And nobody more fervently than 'big boutique' guitar and amp maker John Suhr, a fellow Californian who has long been a fan of the Kelley mystique. Suhr's JS Industries reissued the Jim Kelley Reverb Combo a little over three years ago in cooperation with Kelley himself, and it has been well received by players enamoured of this unique means of tone generation. The brand-new Jim Kelley Reverb Model 1x12 combo on test here is totally hand-built to the precise original design of the late 70s; with it – because a Kelley amp really isn't a Kellely amp without one – we also have the newly manufactured, original-spec Power Attenuator, which has always been a key component in allowing anyone other than arena rockers to crank up these amps into full-bloom overdrive.

On the face of it, this thing appears a very simple concoction for a combo costing so much of your hard-earned cash, and it is. The expense is all in the engineering and the top-quality components that do their thing within, producing a small combo that weighs a freakin' ton as a



Everything inside is built to the original spec using high-quality components

KEY FEATURES

Jim Kelley Reverb Combo and Power Attenuator

- **PRICE** $3,495, Power Attenuator $599 (approx)
- **CONTROLS** Gain, treble, bass, reverb; pull switching for presence, bright and mid boost
- **OUTPUT** 60 watts, with 30-watt half-power mode
- **TUBES** 3x 12AX7s, 1x 12AT7, 4x 6V6GTs
- **FEATURES** Footswitchable boost, 4- and 8-ohm outputs
- **SPEAKER** EVM 12L Classic 12"
- **DIMENSIONS** 20x17.5x9.25"
- **WEIGHT** 72lbs
- **CONTACT** JS Technologies nigel@suhr.com

result. It's worth stating up front, too, that this is intended as a tone tool for the true professional – and the well-heeled fan, collector or hobbyist who wants to achieve that sound at home – and the Kelley ethos really doesn't make room for appeasing the entry-level player or the budget-minded weekender. This is what the company does, and it doesn't do it any other way.

Kelley might eschew preamp-generated distortion, but that doesn't mean this front end is under-powered. There are three stages of 12AX7-generated gain prior to the phase inverter, which is – somewhat unusually – a split-phase inverter like that used on many of the medium-sized Fender tweed amps from the mid-to-late 50s.

Rather than doing the generically Fender, Vox or Marshall thing, the two-knob EQ section that follows the lone gain knob actually governs Kelley's rendition of an active Baxandall tone stage, comprising a network that delivers flat bass and treble with those knobs set at noon, but a notable cut or boost when you dial them below or above that point. Pull the gain knob for a presence lift, pull the treble for brightness or the bass for mid boost. The latter adds thickness to the mids, while a jack round on the back panel takes a single latching footswitch to engage a second preset post-EQ boost to add some sizzle to lead tones without compromising the preamp's robustness. The front-panel power switch gives you positions for 60 watts (full power) and 30 watts, which cuts out two of the four 6V6s. Round the back, there's a standby switch and outputs for 4- and 8-ohm speaker loads. The compact cab carries a front-loaded EVM 12L Classic, a powerful and sensitive driver known for its balanced frequency response and an ability to translate clean and overdriven tones with equal aplomb.

Meaty, bold tone is this thing's forte – that and a punchy firm delivery that refrains from being hard

The Jim Kelley Power Attenuator is itself a little marvel – and should be at that price, right? Its single big knob governs a pair of high-quality 100-watt Ohmite rheostats ganged back to back in an L-pad configuration, to reduce your power output as you turn it down, while maintaining a relatively steady impedance relationship between amp and speaker. It has a three-way high-frequency compensation switch for returning sparkle to heavily attenuated settings and an XLR jack for a footswitch to engage and disengage attenuation; there isn't a footswitch included here, but it was of more use with Kelley's old two-channel amps anyway.

I tested the rig with a Gibson Custom Shop 1959 Les Paul Reissue, a vintage-inspired Lentz S-type guitar and a Gretsch-ified Thorn Artisan with TV Jones pickups, and found it entirely receptive to all guitars and styles of playing I could throw at it. Meaty, bold tone is this thing's forte – that and a propensity for a punchy, firm delivery that nevertheless refrains from being hard or by any means devoid of harmonic complexity. Keep it lower than 11 o'clock or so and it's one of the more dynamic and dimensional clean tones you're likely to encounter. Push it harder and it transitions sweetly and easily into rich, toothsome overdrive, producing a great and superbly touch-sensitive lead tone that is easily dialed back into clean territory using the guitar's volume control.

The Reverb Combo's simple two-knob EQ is extremely flexible and effective (it's a wonder this Baxandall format isn't more popular in guitar circles), and the pull switches account for plenty of further versatility. There's no footswitch (or footswitch jack) for the reverb, and I'd like to have seen one, but many reverb fans take it as an 'always-on' effect – and if that's you, you'll want to swim in this luscious, rolling rendition of the classic Fender-influenced template song after song anyway.

As for the Power Attenuator, well... it works, and works very well. I have tried, and owned, a stack of attenuators over the years, and this is easily among the most transparent and effective. In short, the Jim Kelley Reverb Model and Power Attenuator are professional tools for serious tone generation, and worth a look if you're on the prowl for alternatives to the traditional high-end fare.

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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

NAMM *Top 25*

It's that time of year again when flights from Heathrow to Los Angeles run out of alcohol and the cost of two-star hotel rooms in the Anaheim area skyrockets. Stop! It's NAMMertime...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Chris Vinnicombe & Eleanor Jane**

Okay, okay. This is the April 2016 issue of *Guitar & Bass* magazine, on sale in March, and we're reporting on a trade show that took place back in January. Welcome to magazine time, folks. Doubtless you checked out all the news live from the musical instrument industry's social event of the season on guitar-bass.net and via our various social media channels, but even if you did, we've had some time for reflection and whittled down the thousands of new instruments, amps, effects and accessories we saw on the show floor to a succint list of just 25 of our favourite things.

As well as acting as a decent barometer with regard to industry trends for the coming year – torrefied and seasoned timbers were everywhere and not just in the acoustic market; everyone seemed to be getting their bake on for NAMM – as ever there was no shortage of the mildly ridiculous at the show. Naming no names, we noticed a few budget relic jobs that wouldn't pass for a real vintage instrument from across the street. In a blizzard. In addition, it seems as if Bluetooth functionality is being added to everything. And we mean *everything*. For no apparent reason. And we're not saying that the tiny pedal phenomenon is over, but there certainly seems to be an at least partial move back towards the big box and the three- or four-function multi-effects unit, with everyone from budget brands to boutique gurus such as Keeley getting on board with that. Next year, we guarantee that there will be at least one product made from torrefied wood that has Bluetooth functionality built into it. You'll be able to wirelessly stream your music through it. Great.

Cynicism aside, across the following pages are 25 great new products that we either think will light a fire in 2016 or we just can't wait to check out. Don't break open that piggy bank before reading onwards...

The new **Gretsch Players Edition** models include several smart features designed to make them a much more stable proposition for the gigging musician, such as thinner bodies, pinned Rocking Bar bridges, Schaller locking tuners, straplocks and, best of all, string-through Bigsby vibratos (3) that no longer require you to be an octopus to perform a rapid string change. Our pick of the bunch is the beautiful G6118T-LIV Players Edition Anniversary (4) in a two-tone Lotus Ivory and Charcoal Metallic finish. Visit gretschguitars.com for more.

Another retro looker with wind in its semi-hollow sails, the **Duesenberg Gran Majesto** (1) turned numerous heads with its super-cool automobile stylings and Phonico pickups. The double-cutaway model in Catalina Green gets our vote, but a single-cutaway version in Vintage Burst, sporting Duesenberg's Radiator Tremola is also available. Head to brilliantdistribution.co.uk for the full skinny.

The big noise from **PRS Guitars** in Anaheim was all about the CE 24 (2), which sees the snap and twang of a bolt-on electric solidbody return to the company's Core Line. The satin nitrocellulose finish neck with its Pattern Wide profile is a joy to hold, and for an RRP of £1,869 you also get the company's USA-made 85/15 pickups. A killer workhorse.

Fender offset junkies will be interested to learn that the company's new Magnificent Seven series of limited edition designs for 2016 includes the American Standard Offset Telecaster (5), available in Lake Placid Blue, 2-Colour Sunburst and Olympic White. Meanwhile, over on the **Gibson** stand, the Memphis-built 1958 ES-335 VOS (6) model in a gorgeous natural blonde hue stopped us in our tracks. Genuine early-58 models without neck binding are ultra-rare and, if you can find one, unobtainably expensive, but this look has always been one of our absolute favourite incarnations of the ES-335. We'll have a full review next month... >

The **Danelectro** '64 7 is Mosrite-influenced to the max with a German carve, offset neck pickup and zero fret joining a double lipstick pickup configuration and a reverse body outline used previously by the company on the Hodad. Visit www.jhs.co.uk for more information. On a similarly retro, offset theme, over on the **Guild** stand, the company was showcasing prototypes of its newly-resurrected S-200 T-Bird 9, the first official appearance of this body shape since the now-defunct DeArmond version in the 1990s. This is more vintage-accurate and features a Hagstrom-style vibrato, slider switches and much more. Surf on over to www.selectron-uk.co.uk to find out more.

On to amplifiers then, and **Marshall**'s long-awaited new generation was finally unveiled. The CODE 8 is fully programmable and features preamp, power amp and speaker cabinet models developed in collaboration with audio software pioneers Softube. There's a tonne of effects, app control, USB recording and the ubiquitous Bluetooth streaming functionality too. With prices starting as low as £169 and the 100-watt 2x12 combo set to be only £289, we expect these to fly.

Fender's big push was behind its new Bassbreaker range, but we got most excited about The Edge Deluxe 10, a signature amp for the U2 man that features a handwired 50s 5E3 circuit, a 12-inch Celestion Blue speaker, a tightened low end and a custom-tapered volume control. We liked the specifications and sound of this model a lot and suspect it has a lot to offer above and beyond the signature tones of Mr Evans.

From UK company **Victory Amps** and the genius that is amp design guru Martin Kidd, V22 The Sheriff 11 offers Plexi-inspired tones and beyond from a pair of EL84s, 22 watts and two channels that are stackable via footswitch. There are also high- and low-power modes. We can't wait to get our ears around it.

It would have been worth heading to the **Bad Cat Amplifiers** stand just to see the sexy array of Novo Guitars leaning up against

Special FX

Limited to just 1,000 units globally, the **Way Huge Overrated Special** was designed by effects guru Jeorge Tripps for this month's *G&B* coverstar, Joe Bonamassa. We bumped into Jeorge and persuaded him to give us the skinny: "Basically, when he went to do the Muddy Wolf show at Red Rocks, he changed his whole rig. He was using a Tube Screamer and I was like, 'how about I build you a Tube Screamer type thing?' I was working on the Green Rhino MKIV at the time, which is a similar kind of thing. He wanted a 500hZ control, but I basically just built it as a prototype for him so he had a pedal that did what he wanted it to do. And that pedal was silver and said 'effect pedal' on it, and that's it. And he took it to the show, loved it, super happy. And he came back and was like 'hey, can you make me one that says overrated special in *that* font?' And I was like, 'sure'. So we made three of 'em. Then he started tweeting about it and everyone freaked out. It's basically a modified Green Rhino MKIV in classic mode, with the 500hZ. But the way he sets it most of the time is with the 500hZ centred and the volume and drive dimed! We didn't want to make a tonne of them 'cause this was for Joe and it's the one he uses, exactly."

the amps, but happily the stateside boutique amplifier specialists had a couple of new designs to show us, too. Coming soon to Coda Music (www.coda-music.com), the USA Player Series Cub 15R 12 and 40R sound seriously great, while PCB construction means that the price point looks set to be extremely attractive too. Our pick of the pair is the Cub 15R and we couldn't resist grabbing a guitar and giving it a spin on the stand. In EF86 mode, think everything from *Paperback Writer* to greasy rock 'n' roll boogie tones straight from the church of the Reverend Billy F Gibbons. We like very much.

Looking very fetching all lit up in blue, the The TubeMeister Deluxe 20 from **Hughes & Kettner** 14 is a seriously cute lunchbox head and, thanks to clever DI and power soak functionality, it's as comfortable in a desktop, home studio environment as it is on top of a speaker cabinet on a club stage. Look out for an in-depth review next issue and visit www.jhs.co.uk for more.

Down in the basement in Hall E there was something of a buzz brewing thanks to Manchester company **Stone Deaf Effects & Amplification**, which brought a whole new range of amplifiers and a stack of effects to Anaheim. Alongside eight- and 50-watt incarnations, Stone Deaf's SD30 head 15 and combo offers "an all-analogue class A or class A/B British-sounding guitar amplifier with a digital control system to enable the user to store and recall a variety of tonal palettes at the touch of a button. The preset bank enables you to store any combination of settings on eight banks with up to 32 user-stored presets available." Yep, that's right, 32 presets on a Brit-made valve amp. We'll give it the review treatment soon. And as if that wasn't enough, the company showcased five new stompboxes 13 – the Syncopy analogue delay with 500ms of delay, the Tremotron analogue tremolo with tap tempo and a wave shape manipulator, a successor to the company's popular PDF-1 (called the PDF-2, of course), the Kliptonite dual velcro fuzz and overdrive pedal and the high-gain Warp Drive stompbox. Phew. >

Taylor-made

Like the most luxurious, harmonically rich cannon you've ever heard, **Taylor**'s Grand Orchestra 858e 12-string is possibly the loudest acoustic 12 we've come across. Taylor's Master Luthier Andy Powers talked and played us through the Californian company's new models for the show and the 858e was the one that really captured our imagination. We'll have a full review very soon but in the meantime, here's what the ever-affable Mr Powers had to say about it: "When I first designed the Grand Orchestra, the line of thought that I followed with the internal architecture basically precluded it from being a 12-string design because it was meant as a real touch-sensitive large-body guitar. "I'd been playing with an idea that's actually going into our revoiced 500 Series line and I thought oh, that would work! I literally was driving to the shop one morning and thought, OK, that would totally work! But it makes for the classic, big, powerful, loud, vibrant 12-string guitar! It's the guitar most likely to be taken out at an open-mic night, it's perfect for supporting a singer or writing songs upon. It's kind of a wall of sound approach. This is for the guy who is strumming chords, he's backing up his vocals, writing songs with it... "And it's part of the 800 Series so it's put together with hot hide glue, has this ultra-thin finish and everything else that goes with it." For more information, visit the Taylor Guitars website at www.taylorguitars.com

Three cool new stompboxes from **Supro** (16 & 17) all feature expression pedal inputs. The Fuzz has both Muff and Fuzz Face-like characteristics, and an external expression pedal allows you to control the treble. The Drive pedal is inspired by cranked Supro amp tones, and its toggle switch flips between bold or rich transformer windings, while the Boost gives you an extra 20dB of gain with a toggle switch for frequency emphasis. All three enclosures are impressively rugged with easy side battery access and top-mounted connections that save on all-important pedalboard real estate. **Valeton**'s Dapper 18 micro multi-effects unit fits delay, distortion, overdrive, a tuner and an effects loop into a slim unit that will fit in your gigbag. Expect a very attractive price point and check out more from Valeton on Facebook (facebook.com/valetoneffects). **MXR**'s new Reverb 19 crams the functionality of a rack reverb unit into a standard stompbox enclosure with everything from esoteric ambience to an authentically splashy spring mode. You can also attach an expression pedal to further expand its palette. We're impressed. Visit www.westsidedistribution.com for details. Last but by no means least, and modelled by Mr Adrian Emsley, are **Orange**'s latest stompboxes – the Amp Detonator Buffered AB-Y and the Two Stroke boost EQ 20. Hit orangeamps.com for plenty more. >

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A new logo for **Seagull** 22 made its debut at the show, as did numerous new models including the S6 Original QIT, S6 Original Slim Concert Hall GT QIT, Performer CW Concert Hall QIT and Maritime SWS Mahogany GT QIT, all available in the rather fetching new Burnt Umber finish 21. Visit www.440distribution.com for more.

Yamaha's popular FG700 acoustics have been superseded by the all-new FG800 23 range for 2016 after extensive research, including feedback from players, dealers, customers and industry experts. The solid-top guitars have more bass and volume, feel and sound fantastic and are priced very keenly indeed. Find out more at uk.yamaha.com.

"You've gotta have **Faith**," someone once sang, and he must have been referring to the very cute Faith Nomad Mini Neptune 24 mahogany travel electro based on Patrick James Eggle's acclaimed 'Saluda' shape.

Beautiful in their simplicity as well as in sound and feel, **Martin**'s new 17 Series models set many pulses racing at the show. Seen here are the grand concert, 12-fret 00-17S in Whiskey Sunset 27 and the 14-fret 00L-17 in Black Smoke 26.

Finally, bassists can grab a slice of the lifestyle/small amp craze, too, with **Blackstar**'s first dedicated bass amp, the Fly 3 Bass 25. It's been revoiced and re-engineered especially for bass, and even among the chaos of the show floor this little amp sounded great. Meanwhile, after previewing last year, **Ashdown**'s B-Social home desktop amp 28 made a big splash thanks to a demo from none other than Doug Wimbish.

Speech impaired

and completely

BLIND TO LIMITATIONS.

NANCY'S SEVERE STUTTER CAUSED ANXIETY EVERY TIME SHE SPOKE. BUT WHEN SHE LEARNED TO PLAY GUITAR, NANCY DEVELOPED SOMETHING MUCH MORE THAN MUSICAL TALENT—SHE DEVELOPED CONFIDENCE. KNOWING FULL WELL THE STAGE IS NO PLACE FOR A STUTTERER, SHE STEPPED ONTO IT ANYWAY. AND WHEN NANCY BEGAN TO SING, SOMETHING ASTONISHING HAPPENED: HER STUTTER COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED. SINCE THEN, NANCY HAS WRITTEN OVER 100 SONGS AND PERFORMED BEFORE AUDIENCES OF MORE THAN 500 PEOPLE. IT'S THE KIND OF STORY THAT INSPIRES US AT TAYLOR, AND REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD NEEDS MORE PEOPLE LIKE NANCY. *For more about Nancy and others with the courage to step forward, visit taylorguitars.com.*

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READER BOARDS

CHRIS WILSON's board has been through a seemingly never-ending process of evolution, but this is the final version... maybe...

KIT LIST

Chris Wilson

- **PEDALS (IN ORDER)** Buddy Guy Cry Baby, Boss TU-3, Boss RC-1 Loop Station, Strymon Mobius, Amplified Nation Big Bloom Overdrive, Crowther Audio Double Hotcake, Strymon Deco, Boss DD-500, Dr Green Booster Shot, Dunlop Echoplex Preamp, JHS Angry Charlie, ThroBak Strange Master, DigiTech Drop, Custom Pedalboards Patch Bay, Boss ES-8 Switching System
- **PATCH CABLES** Van Damme cable, Neutrik jacks
- **POWER SUPPLY** Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 4x4
- **BOARD TYPE** Custom Pedalboards G2 Medium
- **HEAR IT HERE** chriswilson.bandcamp.com

What inspired this setup?

"What I was trying to achieve was as versatile a board as possible with an array of different effects at hand, but all easily accessible at the tap of a switch, made possible by the ES-8. The MIDI functionality on the ES-8 has completely transformed how I use my board. Sound-wise, I wanted anything from crystal clean to all-out treble-boosted Brian May tones. Working in a covers band, it's essential to cover most bases. Not only that, I needed something that could give me great blues and classic-rock tones for my own original solo projects. The Double Hotcake gives me a great general bluesy overdrive, the Big Bloom offers up some nice Dumble tones, the Angry Charlie nails high-gain Marshall sounds and with the Strange Master treble booster running into the Hotcake, I get a really nice, vocal-like lead tone."

Tell us a little about the journey...

"To be honest, my board has been through so many transformations over the years, it's hard to remember everything I went through to get to this point, but there's not a lot I haven't had! I think, like most people, I started out with things like the TS9, Big Muff, Blues Driver, Boss DD-7 etc, but as time has gone on I've gotten a clearer idea of what sound I'm looking for. It's a lot less trial and error these days, and with so many pedals out there now we're spoiled for choice! Not only have my pedals seen changes over the years, but so has my actual board, which has now been upgraded to the excellent Custom Pedalboards G2 Medium board. Not only does it look great, it would survive a bomb blast!"

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?

"I've become a bit notorious within some circles for declaring my board as being finally complete, only to buy something new within a matter of days, so I'll just say I have no plans to add any more at this point in time – although I do plan to add the Strymon Zuma power supply to replace my Voodoo Lab when it becomes available in the spring. The fact it's an expandable power supply system is very handy, just in case you do add more..."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"My main gigging guitar is my HSS Strat, with Seymour Duncan pickups. I run stereo into a Marshall 1974X and tweed Blues Junior. The 1974X is superb and a big part of my sound."

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"When it comes to pedals, there really aren't any rules. I used to get hung up on pedal order and what was considered right and wrong, but it's best to just experiment and if it sounds right, it's right. I also made a point of learning how to solder my own patch cables. Those solderless patch cable kits are pretty expensive and with a board of this size, it'd cost a few hundred quid."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Huey Morgan

The Fun Lovin' Criminals frontman and radio DJ picks his favourite records from a huge collection

Getty Images

Huey Morgan is the New York-born singer and guitarist in Fun Lovin' Criminals, the band he formed in 1993. FLC have recorded six studio albums, and are best known for the UK Top 40 hit single *Scooby Snacks*. His side-project, Huey And The New Yorkers, released the album *Say It To My Face* in 2012. He has also served in the US Marines and has appeared on a number of TV shows, including Never Mind The Buzzcocks. He hosts his own show on BBC Radio 6 Music, The Huey Show.

The 20th anniversary collector's edition of Fun Lovin' Criminals' 1996 album Come Find Yourself is released on 11 March.

Van Halen
VAN HALEN

"This was the first record I started listening to guitar-wise. When that album came around, it was amazing. That whole *Eruption* thing – what the fuck is this guy doing?! I hadn't heard anything like that since Hendrix and it made me want to be able to do that with a guitar. He was the guy that was telling all those old guitarists to go fuck off!"

Miles Davis
BIRTH OF THE COOL

"This record kind of defines how jazz is now. Before that it was all big-band, Louis Armstrong kind of stuff, and he charges in with this really great mixture of inspiration and improvisation. That record in particular was a great lesson for the way you phrase your solos. It taught me to do stuff with the bars your play rather than just jerking off on the pentatonic."

801
801 LIVE

"*801* was an influential record. They were nailing some hard emotions and difficult time signatures, and they only did three gigs. I love a lot of Brian Eno's stuff, but on *801* they were hammering that shit! There were some cats in that band! That got me into the idea that if you're going to play in a band, you have to play with people who are better than you."

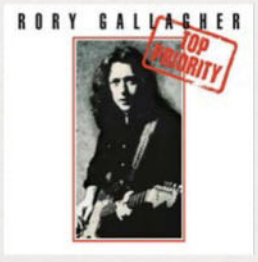
Led Zeppelin
LED ZEPPELIN I

"That whole record is taking the blues and the spiritual cacophony of what was going on at the time and mixing it together the best any band has ever done. You can't deny Zeppelin being one of the best bands of all time. The shit John Paul Jones was doing was monster, Bonham was one of the best drummers ever and Robert Plant could sing the panties off a nun!"

Muddy Waters
THE BEST OF MUDDY WATERS

"When I first started playing the guitar, I wanted to play the blues, jazz and R&B, stuff like that. Jimmy Page was definitely the guy who took another one of my favourite records – *The Best Of Muddy Waters*... I remember having this early-on, and in my mind it solidifying the idea that you can draw a straight line from Muddy Waters to Jimmy Page to Van Halen."

Rory Gallagher
TOP PRIORITY



"This guy didn't have a filter – whatever his mind was thinking, his fingers played. I own a Rory Gallagher Strat from the Custom Shop and it's the best Strat I own. He got me into the idea of if you're given eight bars somehwere, fuck those eight bars up, don't dick around getting into the solo, doing your little trick and then getting out of the solo, fuck that!"

Chic
C'EST CHIC

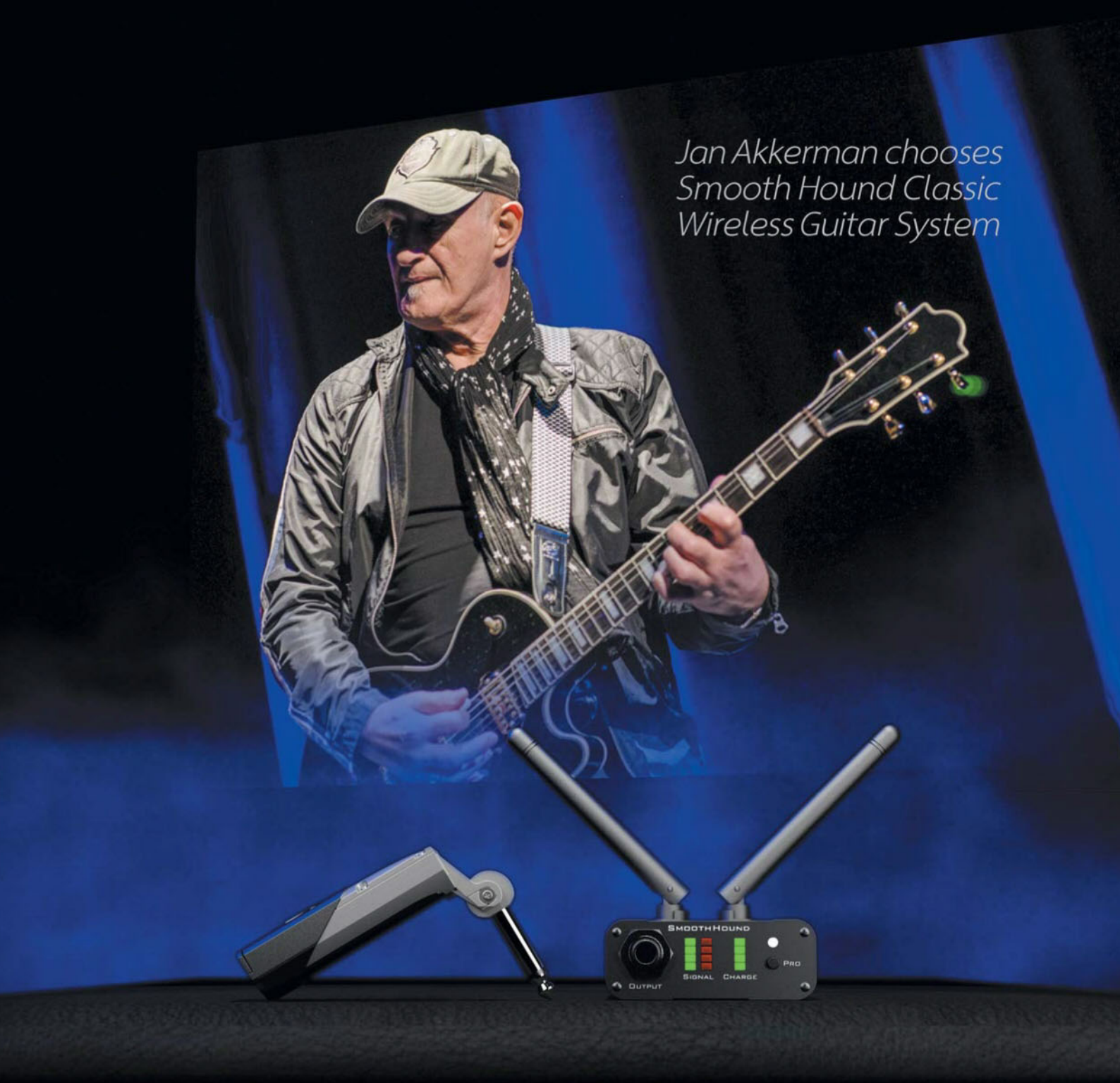
"People sleep on Nile, but he's a monster player. He knows his jazz chops, he knows his blues chops... I hang out with Nile and try to pull his coat on everything he does. You could be Steve Vai or someone and dick around in a weird minor key, but I didn't listen to Steve Vai on the radio when I was a kid. I wanted to write songs that would get on the radio."

The Jimi Hendrix Experience
ARE YOU EXPERIENCED

"I heard this before I played guitar and it scared me! I had to jump out of aeroplanes in the marines and so did Jimi – that's where the similarities end! He was a one of a kind, and the way he wrote songs, they were amazing, with bizarre complex rhythms. The mystery is even more now, as you watch YouTube and still don't know what the fuck he was doing!"

Beastie Boys
LICENSED TO ILL

"When I was a kid, I was drawn to hip hop, but that record made a whole load of sense to me. You hear Kerry King, and Rick Rubin doing all his horrible distorted stuff and it was a perfect snapshot of the evolution of popular music that made me realise whatever I wanted to do musically, I didn't have any borders to cross because everything was wide open."



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DIY WORKSHOP

GRETSCH CONVERSION PART ONE

Huw Price finally fulfils a long-held ambition as he takes a well-worn vintage Gretsch Anniversary and turns it into a 50s-style 6120 dream machine...

1 Before starting work, a set of Gretsch tuners, a bridge and a V-cut Bigsby from a Duo Jet were thrown on the husk to test if it was solid enough to tune up and whether it was playable. In both cases, the answer was yes, but only just

2 This guitar has been played a lot and divots in the fingerboard have been packed with filler. To even up the colour, this area of the board has been brushed with black paint

3 You can see scratches on the surface of the top. The worry is whether the scratches can be sanded away without going through the outer layer of the plywood

This is a project I have wanted to do for several years. The basic idea was to turn a derelict vintage Anniversary into my dream 50s-style Gretsch 6120. The first task was to source a suitable donor guitar that was structurally intact – and that took a while.

Many of these old Gretsches have been retro-fitted with other pickups, and holes have been routed to accommodate them. You'll often see bashed-in sides where the jack socket has taken an impact, and you can be pretty sure any old Gretsch will need a neck reset at some point. Binding rot is another perennial problem with vintage Gretsch guitars – and, despite various theories, nobody seems entirely clear what causes it.

Patience was rewarded and eventually this Gretsch Anniversary was offered for sale on the Gretsch Discussion Pages by a minister in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

He was selling it on behalf of one of his parishioners, Clyde, and it even came with a bit of a back story.

Clyde told how he had been looking for "an electrified Gretsch" many years ago and his brother bought this one for him after finding it in "the largest pawn shop in Texas". When Clyde got the guitar it had already been refinished in black, and he proceeded to strip off the lacquer with the intention of restoring the Anniversary to its original two-tone green colour scheme. Clyde got as far as stripping off the black lacquer and, to be fair, he made a good job of it, but never got any further.

The grand plan

Although it had been painted black and Clyde wanted to go green, the amount of orange stain suggests that somebody else had intended to make this guitar look like a 6120. The back and sides are fairly uniform in colour, but the top has been heavily sanded and looks a lot lighter. Tell-tale scratch marks all over the body and neck show that course abrasives had been used, so a lot of sanding will be required to prep this Annie for a clear finish.

Trestle bracing is a crucial feature of 6120 Gretsches that were made between 1958 and 1961. Trestles also featured on the top-of-the-range White Falcon, as well as the lowly Anniversary. We can discuss the minutiae of trestle bracing further down the line, but suffice to say it was Gretsch's response to Chet Atkins' request for a guitar that sounded and sustained more like a solidbody.

While Gretsch carried on installing trestle braces in the 6120, Anniversaries made after 1960 didn't have them. Gretsch guru Edward Ball helped me date this guitar, and based on production batches he concluded it was made late in 1960 or very early in 1961.

So no trestle braces in this one, which means I'll have to put them in myself.

Late-50s 6120s and Anniversaries had ebony fingerboards, but Gretsch swapped the Annies over to rosewood when it dropped the trestle bracing. Early examples, such as this one, were not bound and the thumbnail markers continued to the edge of the board to provide a front and side view. Although it's in a right mess, this fingerboard is a lovely old piece of rosewood, so my intention is to re-use it 2. However, the edges are so worn and damaged I will be adding binding. I'll also keep the nut rather than install a 6120-style zero fret because, like Brian Setzer, I prefer the look and feel.

A single HiLo'Tron pickup would once have been installed at the neck – along with various other pickups, judging by the Annie's assortment of filled holes 5. My plan is to rout the top and install a pair of Filter'Tron humbuckers. At present, I'm undecided about the control layout because I never use most of the knobs and switches on my Tennessean. So a stripped-down arrangement with a pickup selector, master volume and master tone would suffice.

One of the F holes has broken and both will need to be enlarged and bound for that classic 6120 look 6. I'm also concerned that the top has lost so much of its thickness through over-sanding it may need re-veneering. The headstock will have to be re-veneered and bound too, and I'll probably end up cutting a new logo and horseshoe inlay. But before any of that can happen, the neck will have to come off.

Glue test

Firstly, I had to determine whether the glue used to fix the neck was actually hide glue. This is important because steam can soften and melt hide glue, but it won't have any effect on urea formaldehyde or epoxy glues.

Under the fingerboard extension, there was a considerable amount of squeeze out. I applied masking tape to protect the body and eased a hacksaw blade under the tongue to saw into the glue 7. Before long, I had a nice pile of glue dust, which I put into a glass bowl and covered with a small quantity of boiling water. The glue dust dissolved quite easily, so I was confident that steaming off the neck was a possibility.

Screw removal

Gretsch had an unusual method of attaching necks. Actually, at the risk of appearing Python-esque, let's try that again. Amongst Gretsch's unusual methods of neck attachment, there was the infamous neck screw. Typically, vintage Gretsch guitars have a circular dot inlay in the vicinity of the neck join. >

4 The shadow on the left where the fingerboard extension meets the body is glue squeeze out. This provides an opportunity to test what type of glue was used and whether steam can be used to loosen the joint

5 Originally, there would have been four holes for the pickup surround, two for the pickup and one for the pickguard. We count three extra holes – and all have been plugged with wood

6 The only damage to the body is a missing chunk of wood from the F hole on the treble side. This will have to be repaired and the F holes will be reshaped

7 To obtain a glue sample, masking tape is applied to the guitar body for protection and a hacksaw blade is slipped under the neck. The resulting glue dust dissolves in boiling water, so we are good to go

8 We weren't able to get in as far as we would have liked with the Forstner bit, so this will need tidying up later. The screw head can be seen inside the hole

9 The screw came out quite easily and measures 1.75 inches long

10 Although rated for 20 bar, the steam blew through the hose on a couple of occasions. Stay safe by wearing oven mitts and goggles

11 The 14th and 15th frets were removed and 2.5mm diameter holes were drilled into the slots to insert the steam needle. Of the two, the 14th fret seems to be the best location, and both holes should be about 3/8" away from the fingerboard edge

Depending on the model, this can be located on the back of the heel, the side of the cutaway or the rear of the body. Measuring half an inch in diameter, the plug conceals the head of a large wood screw that Gretsch would drive through the body or neck and into the neck block or the neck tenon.

Whether this was used to help secure the neck in position as the glue dried, or as a failsafe in the event of glue joint failure is a matter for conjecture. The actuality is probably a bit of both. Regardless, the screw must be taken out before the neck can be removed.

If the side dot is inside the cutaway, performing a neck removal is that bit trickier. Fortunately, the Anniversary and 6120 models all had plugs on the back of the neck heel, so drilling them out is easy. It's recommended that you use a Forstner bit of the same diameter as the original plug – or slightly wider. Mark the centre point of the plug, carefully position the Forstner bit and start drilling. Before long, the Forstner bit's centre-locating tip should hit the screw head, and that will be as far as you can go.

Swap over to a regular drill bit with a 3/8" diameter and drill slowly into the centre of the hole to expose the screw head 8. You may also need to use a craft knife or dental tool to pick out any stray fibres. With the head fully exposed, take a large flat head screwdriver and turn the screw anti-clockwise – it should come straight out 9.

That's the theory, but on this guitar the screw head was located quite close to the surface. This prevented the forstner bit from cutting into the heel cleanly, so the plan is to tidy this up once the neck has been reattached and the screw reinstated.

Steaming the neck

Next to removing the top, taking off the neck was the procedure that worried me the most, because I had never done it before. When I write these articles, I try to use non-specialist tools wherever possible, but from time to time you are obliged to buy the correct tool, and if you're planning to remove a set neck a steam needle attachment is essential.

You can buy steam needle attachments from luthier suppliers and they are available with or without a hose for attaching to a steam generator. I would suggest going for the proper hose because the problems are twofold – heat and pressure. If you use ordinary rubber tubing, you'll probably end up blowing a hole in the tube. I went to a car brakes specialist and bought some hose that was described as being suitable for up to 20 bar and 100 degrees C.

Even so, I ended up blowing a couple of holes in the pipe and jubilee clips were barely able to keep the hose attached 10.

If, like me, you try to save money by buying the steam needle without a hose, you may regret it.

Various appliances can serve as steam generators. Some people use the milk steamer attachment of coffee makers and others use pressure cookers. I took my feed from a Vaporetto steam cleaner.

Once you have your equipment sorted, you'll need to drill holes into the guitar to insert the steam needle. Gretsch Anniversary necks are attached via a traditional dovetail joint. The procedure is to remove a fret then drill down into the joint through the fret slot. Replacing the fret should conceal the hole 11.

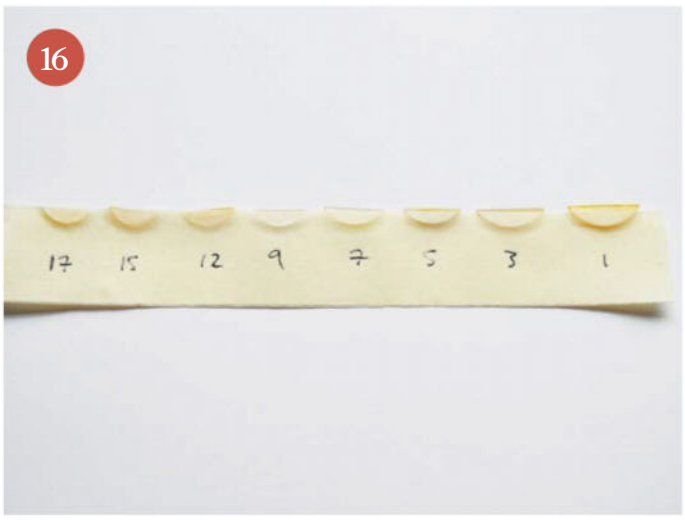
Opinions differ as to whether you should drill through the 14th or 15th fret. Noted Gretsch specialist Curt Wilson (www.oldschoolguitar.net) advocates the 14th, right where the neck joins the body – and having tried both I think he's correct. Two holes are recommended because steam injected through one hole can vent out of the other.

The diameter of the drill bit should be slightly larger than that of the needle and you should start the holes about 3/8" from the edge of the fingerboard. Try to follow the line where the heel meets the body, but angle the bit very slightly towards the centre to follow the shape of the dovetail. If you strike lucky, you'll feel it when the bit reaches a void in the joint; that's where you want the steam to be.

Steaming off a neck is a messy business, so if you can't carry out the process outside try working over a sink 12. If that's not possible, put down loads of towels to soak up the water. It's also worth protecting the top of the guitar and the fingerboard with towels and continually mopping the water off the guitar rather than allowing it to pool up. Protect yourself, too, with oven mitts and goggles.

I found pushing the needle too far into the hole created excessive back pressure. Starting shallower and gradually increasing the needle depth as the glue softened up produced better results. Also remember to insert steam in both drill holes and move between them. It takes quite a while before the glue gets hot enough to begin softening and loosening. In this case, it took well over 20 minutes before things started moving.

12 Steaming a neck joint is a wet and messy business, so work in an area where the water isn't going to be an issue. Here, you can see steam venting out of the side of the neck joint



13 Knife blades and a chisel were used to clean the old glue from the dovetail joint. It's best to do this while the glue is still soft from the steam

14 A piece of the neck block came away from the body along with the neck. Fortunately, it was a clean break and the repaint will be undetectable. The glue joint will also be stronger than the original wood

15 Gretsch's dovetail joints weren't exactly precise. A mahogany shim was used on this guitar, but you will sometimes see pieces of cardboard

16 After a few seconds under a hairdryer, the thumbnail markers could be lifted straight off the board. I placed them onto a piece of masking tape, put another strip across the top and numbered them up accordingly

When the steam really begins to penetrate, you may find that it shoots out from the sides of the heel. I was able to hasten the process by easing a very thin bridge removal knife into the gap between the heel and the body. It was particularly easy on the treble side because the glue melted away to reveal a 2mm gap that had been packed with glue and sawdust.

When the time feels right, you can remove the needle and try wiggling the neck back and forth. If the glue is soft enough, you'll feel it move. Some luthiers who do this job regularly use special neck removal jigs to ease necks out of pockets. I eased this one upwards using a side-to-side motion and eventually it pulled free, but if I had a jig I would have used it.

Scrape away the glue while it's still soft and wet to clean up the joint 13. Any old glue left inside the dovetail will weaken the repaired joint. When I was cleaning up, I noticed two types of glue. The original hide glue was easy to clean up with a chisel, but there was also a rubbery and gelatinous glue residue at the bottom of the joint. Somebody may have forced PVA glue into the joint at some point, presumably because the neck was pulling away from the body.

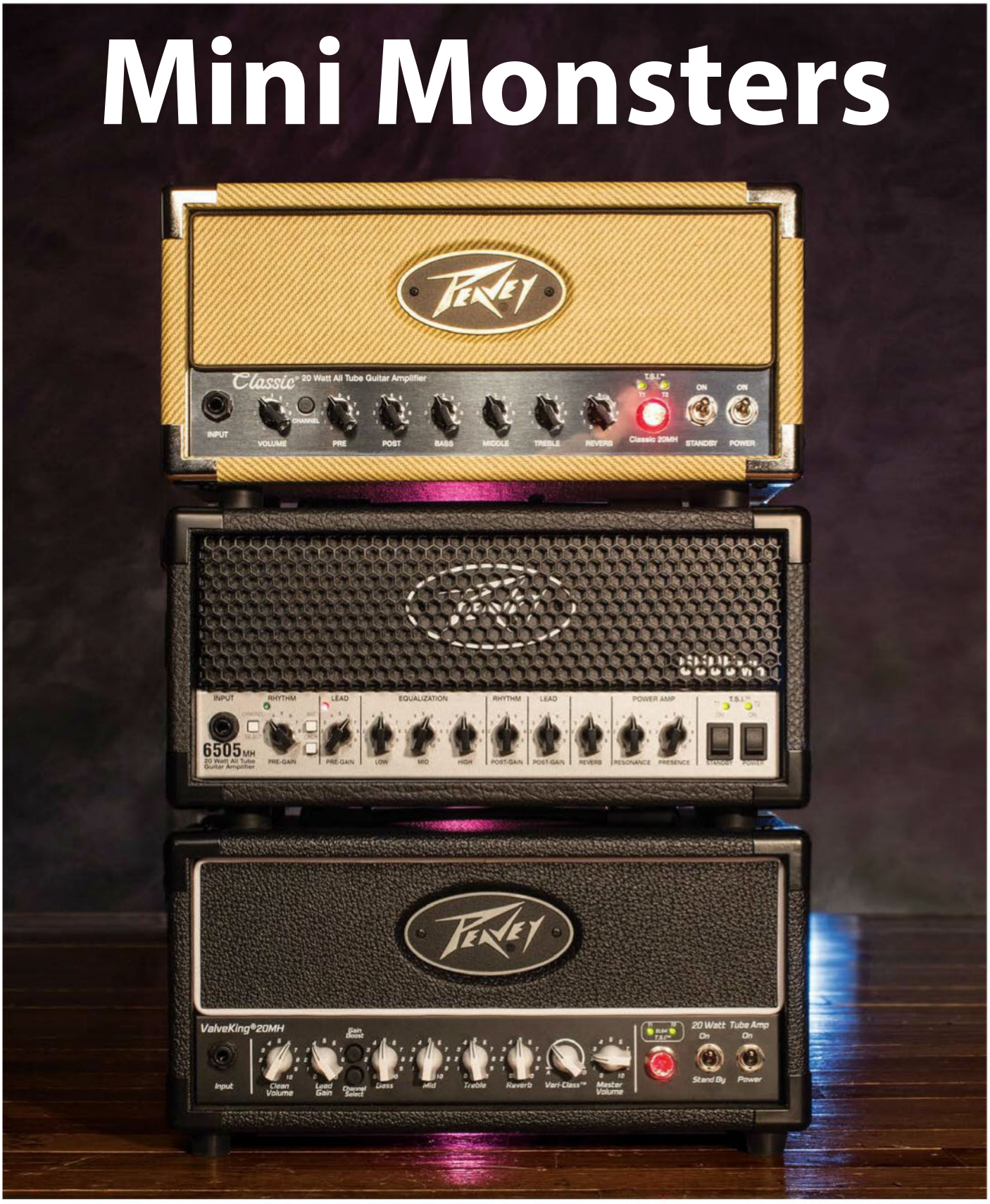
Unfortunately, a chunk of neck block came away along with the neck 14. This doesn't appear to be uncommon with Gretsch neck resets, and this clean break means the chunk will glue back on quite easily. I was also surprised to find a mahogany shim on the bass side of the dovetail that was a quarter of an inch thick 15. Then again, the shim my mate Daniel discovered when he removed the neck of his '59 Anniversary was actually a piece of cardboard. Old gold my foot!

After steaming off a neck you should put everything to one side and let the guitar dry off. I also removed the thumbnail markers and put them somewhere safe 16. The next job will be removing the top, and work will then begin on the neck restoration. But that will have to wait until next time.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw gets stuck into the nitty gritty of the Gretsch restoration project in the second part of this workshop as he tackles the neck and removes the top

Mini Monsters



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at home with Bonamassa

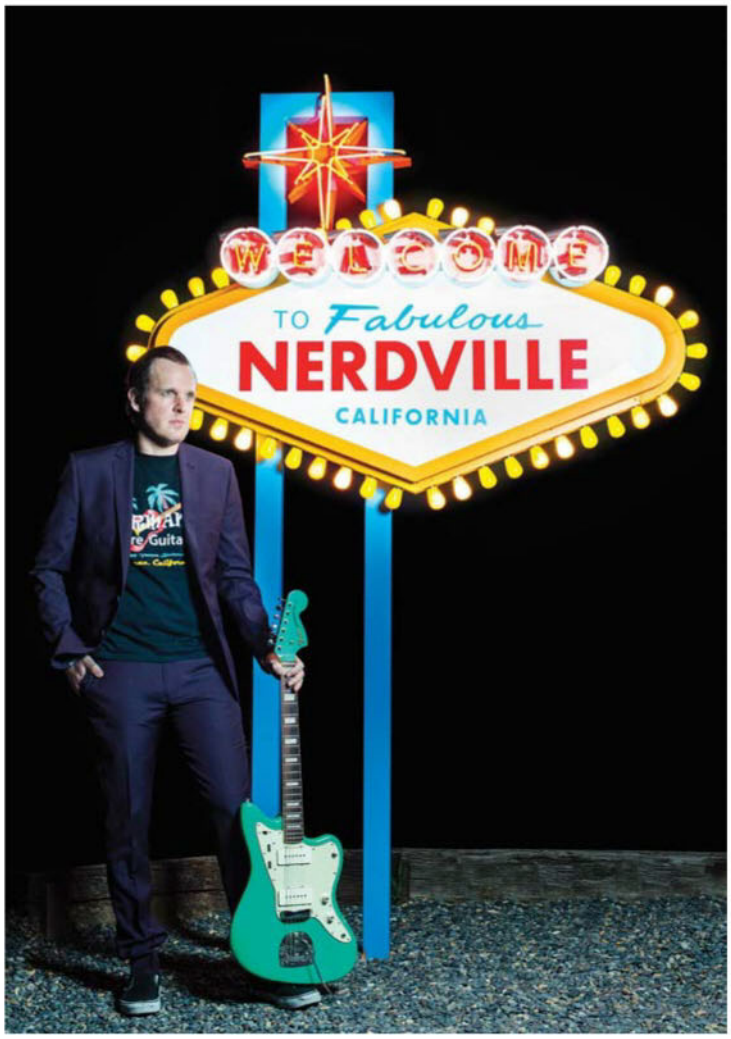
On the eve of the release of his 12th studio solo album, *G&B* visits the hardest working guitar player in showbusiness at his California home to see the guitars that made *Blues Of Desperation* take flight...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Practice, practice, practice. That, so the old joke goes, is the way you get to Carnegie Hall. Yet after a pair of sold-out acoustic performances at the legendary Midtown Manhattan concert venue in January, the biggest challenge for Joe Bonamassa was getting back. 22-24 January 2016 saw a huge storm dump record-breaking levels of snow on the eastern US. With a New York City travel ban in place and tens of thousands of flight cancellations, in order to return to the West Coast, Bonamassa had to apply some creative thinking and drive to Boston before flying home from there.

48 hours later, in considerably sunnier conditions, it's with more than a little relief that we wind our way up his driveway in the Hollywood Hills – complete with neon, Vegas-style 'Welcome To Fabulous Nerdville' sign – safe in the knowledge that the guitarist is behind the front door. Described by Bonamassa as "more of a house now than it ever was," the property was formerly owned by both songwriter/producer Oliver Leiber and Buckcherry's Keith Nelson and was the scene of Rod Stewart album sessions during Leiber's tenure. These days, it's home to one of the finest guitar collections on the face of the earth. As we lose ourselves in a view

FENDER



that stretches all the way to Downtown Los Angeles and the ocean beyond, our host is on the telephone closing yet another deal for a rare vintage piece. Today, it's a 1959 DeArmond R5T amplifier.

Of course, this isn't just a social visit, and the business at hand is to discuss and photograph the instruments that Bonamassa used on his latest studio long-player, *Blues Of Desperation*. Recorded with two drummers at Grand Victor Sound (the former RCA Studio A) in Nashville – a decision designed by producer and long-time collaborator Kevin Shirley to "put the cat amongst the pigeons" and push Joe out of his comfort zone – the album also represents another first for the star: there are no Marshalls on it.

"It's weird because I've been a Marshall guy for most of my career," Joe acknowledges, "but there wasn't the right song." Instead, most of *Blues Of Desperation* features his much-talked-about, all-vintage tweed Fender stage rig, which comprises a pair of high-power '59 Twins and a pair of Bassmans. "It's the loudest rig I've ever used," he enthuses. "It's even louder than the Marshalls and the Dumbles. It will shake the ground. So much so, there was plaster coming off in the studio; every day, there'd be like a layer of dust on top of the amps. One Twin is really the only thing mic'd, but having it all in the room and a couple of room mics just created this cacophony."

"It's the loudest rig I've ever used. It will shake the ground. There was plaster coming off in the studio"

So much for the whole theory about small amps being better for recording, then? "Most of my albums have been recorded with high-powered amps," Bonamassa replies. "There's one exception this time: a fuzzy bit on a song called *Mountain Climbing*. The main sound is basically the Firebird and the Twins and the Bassmans, but I also used a '55 Champ, and the weird thing about a '55 Champ versus a '56 or '57? It's smaller. They were smaller in '55, so it's the same power as a normal Champ and it has this very condensed and punchy sound. I used a brown Deluxe for something, but generally what was happening was that, because the big room in RCA is *so* big, the low-power amps were sounding too compressed in the track.

"A couple of Rod Stewart records were recorded in this house and there's still PVC pipe running into the bedroom. They recorded drums in the living room. If you were recording an amp in this kitchen, it's a very small space. You can get away with a 20- or 30-watt >

Above left **Viva GAS Vegas – the light show Chez Joe begins at 5:30 every evening**
Opposite and above right **This 1951 Nocaster features heavily on the new album and is "all stock except for the PAF that somebody put in the front. If you're a Keith Richards fan you're in love! Because of the humbucker in the front it's out of phase in the middle, so it does the Jimmy Page thing really well. And the flat pole pickup is wound super-hot. I love guitars that are either mint or like this. The sins have already been committed before I purchased it! it's one of the coolest ones I've ever seen. I've had it for over a year and I've used it a lot. Somebody had it since the seventies and it walked into Guitar Center in Hollywood!"**

Above **This 1964 Gibson Firebird III has a prominent role on *Mountain Climbing* and the album's title track. "Some people just totally disregard the tailpiece and wrap over the top," says Joe. "I don't do that 'cause it changes the scale and I don't like the tension. With the single-pickup Firebird, you always have to be on the tone control 'cause the lead pickups on these are so bright. The magic of the Firebird III and V is the middle position. To me, VIIs are not worth the extra money at all."**

Opposite page **Joe purchased this '57 Stratocaster with the proceeds from a garage sale that he held last year in Burbank: "I sold a bunch of stuff that I wasn't using – 4x12 cabinets and pedals – and immediately took all the money and bought this. I was like, save me from myself! But trading a bunch of stuff I wasn't using for a '57 blonde Strat seems like a good deal to me. It's on the solo on *Distant Lonesome Train*."**

amp and it would sound big, larger than life. If you go into RCA with a little tweed Deluxe and you put a mic in front of it? [shakes head] It's all about how big the space is that you're recording in. Some people swear by small amps. I use a few, and I arguably own more small amps than big amps, but I generally like a big-headroom sound."

All that said, the aforementioned 20-watt 6G3 brownface Deluxe is part of the "very specific toolkit" that Bonamassa always takes into the studio: "Brown Deluxes are fantastically underrated amps. You get the right speaker, and if the amp is co-operating, it just sounds like the best, hardest-sounding Marshall. And it's just this big sound. They are almost like tweed amps, they are very distorted, very midrange-y. The mics love 'em. Put a 57 or whatever in front of one and you're really loving life."

Bonamassa continues: "There's always a reverb tank. I use one of the brown Fender spring reverbs, but you can use a brown or a blackface one. A reissue is fine, they all sound the same. I use a reverb tank because I like the chime that it gives, and the microphone in the studio doesn't hear the reverb as much as live. Live, you're swimming! I always leave the reverb on a little bit and it just gives it a nice sheen."

"Brown Deluxes are fantastically underrated. Put a 57 in front of one and you're really loving life"

When it came to choosing the guitars for the album sessions, Bonamassa had to send a selection to Nashville before the bulk of the writing was finished. "I was sending weird stuff that I thought I'd use, maybe, I didn't send a lot. And I purchased a few guitars in Nashville, one from George Gruhn, one from Walter and Christie at Carter Vintage. I got a '23 Gibson Style O that's actually on its way back from Carnegie Hall on a truck somewhere in the Midwest, hopefully not freezing and cracking.

"And I bought a '51 ES-5 in natural. I'm a sucker for the T-Bone Walker thing, I've got four of 'em, but this is a particularly good one. ES-5s are great to look at until you play them and you go, 'this is a piece of shit! How did T-Bone >

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stratocaster
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
Fender Bassman
Marshall

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even get a sound out of this?' So I had that and I had a Grammer Johnny Cash guitar – I have two of them, one is on its way back from Carnegie Hall and the other one is here. That was kind of the acoustic section."

"I try to learn something new about a guitar every day. By playing them you really get to know what's up"

The bulk of the album's electric parts were recorded with a small but discerning collection of toneful vintage instruments. The 1951 Nocaster with a PAF in the neck position that graces the cover of this very issue saw a lot of action – "a particularly beautiful playing and sounding instrument. It wouldn't matter if it was a '71, it's just a killer guitar" – as did the 1959 Les Paul nicknamed The Snakebite on account of its tell-tale Bigsby holes. "It's the one that cured me of that nasty habit," he says of his favourite Burst. "I've played that guitar almost exclusively for a year, it's basically the only one I play now. I love it. I play it every day. When you find the one, you find the one."

Joe also used his 1964 Firebird III "a surprising amount": "The cool thing about a Firebird? In a studio setting – and I always trust Kevin's judgement – I'm never moving mics unless I hear something and hate it after a first >

Opposite page **Used on *Drive*, this 1958 Gretsch Country Club was strung with flatwounds: "It's the same thing with Jaguars and Jazzmasters. As soon as you use flatwound strings, the whole guitar, the scale, everything makes sense."** *Above* **With the Epiphone Cortez plugged in, the main acoustic on the album was a 1969 Grammer Johnny Cash. As Joe's suburst model was in transit from NYC, we shot its twin: "As a rhythm guitar, they're really awesome. They're just special guitars."**

Opposite page **Though it doesn't feature on *Blues Of Desperation*, we couldn't miss the opportunity to photograph the 1959 Les Paul Standard known as Skinnerburst (right) next to Joe's current favourite squeeze, The Snakebite. Just three serial numbers apart, The Snakebite is 9-1948 and Skinnerburst is 9-1951. Bonamassa also owns serial number 9-1953 aka Carmelita.**
This page **Used on album closer *What I've Known For A Very Long Time*, this 1951 Gibson ES-5 is in remarkable condition: "Sometimes you want that quacky out-of-phase thing, sometimes you want to use the front pickup. If the neck angle is right and the lead pickup is up high enough you can get a really cool barking thing out of it. I have another one identical, just the same deal. I also have two sunbursts."**

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Above **Joe's beautifully-worn #1 Burst is known as The Snakebite on account of its still-visible Bigsby vibrato tailpiece holes. "I've had it about a year. It was purchased at a pawnshop in North Carolina for $700 back in 1987, ironically by a fellow whose wife works for my production company in South Carolina. He sold it to a friend of mine and then I got it. He made a tiny profit...! The neck is very small for a '59. It had a Bigsby on it and nobody plugged the holes, which I like. It's honest."**

take. I always default to the Les Paul and he'll say, 'that needs to be brighter, maybe like a Tele'. And if the Les Paul is too dark and the Tele is too bright, the best option is the Firebird. It drives right up the middle, where it's almost like instant Jimmy Page. It's got that quirky middle position thing going on. I used the Firebird a lot."

A 1958 Gretsch and a blonde '57 Stratocaster also made appearances, but by far the most leftfield choice was an Epiphone FT-45 Cortez acoustic fitted with a sixties DeArmond pickup. "It was a gift from a fan of mine in Fort Myers," Joe explains. "It was his brother's, he didn't play so he gave it to me. I tried to give him some money and he wouldn't take any, so I said that I would use it on the record. I just brought it because it's actually a really nice instrument.

"It's not a valuable guitar whatsoever, but we have this song called *This Train* that opens the record and none of it sounded right; the Firebird didn't sound right, the Les Paul and Strat didn't sound right, and I plugged the Epiphone into my live rig, and because the amps were isolated it didn't feed back and I could just wail on it! It produced a very interesting sound, a very Elmore James kind of thing. You can hear me try to bend with acoustic strings – I think the solo was done on the acoustic as well. It was just one of those things that just worked. You'd never call that in a million years. If I heard it I'd think it sounded like the front pickup on some Kay or something like that, but it's this cool, crazy Epiphone that seemed to work. But if I plugged in the Epiphone anywhere in the vicinity of the rig and turned the pickup all the way up like I did, I think the top would just explode off of it."

As an avid collector of vintage guitars, amplifiers and even point-of-sale memorabilia such as illuminated signage and branded clocks, Bonamassa is only half joking when he claims that "most of my life is spent on the phone with some dude with a credit card!" That said, he still believes that using these musical instruments for their intended purpose and taking the time to establish a relationship with them is the most important thing.

"I've played that guitar almost exclusively for a year, it's basically the only one I play now. I love it"

"I try to learn something new about a guitar every day," he says. "You've gotta play 'em. You've gotta understand that by playing them, that's when you really get to know what's up. I hate it when people buy an R9 or anything from the Custom Shop and immediately go out and spend $3,000 on aftermarket parts – why don't you just play it for a couple of gigs? Or even if you don't have any gigs, why don't you just sit there for three or four hours, zone out, beat the thing into oblivion and all of a sudden the guitar looks real; the more you play it, the guitar looks real! It's almost like a Hollywood agent: 'We love you, now just change everything about you!' And then there's a cat that can pull out a sandwich-bodied '78 Les Paul Pro that weighs 12lbs, plug it into a Lab Series L5 – retail value of guitar and amp $1,000 – and kick ass..."

Stay tuned for more from Joe's collection next month. *Blues Of Desperation* is released worldwide on Provogue on Friday, 25 March. Visit jbonamassa.com to purchase tickets for his upcoming live dates.

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Jimmy Fontane

Pet Sounds

Dream Theater's latest offering, *The Astonishing*, is just that – a two-hour concept album telling an engrossing story, with music written by guitarist John Petrucci. **SIMON BRADLEY** hears how he did it.

There's no two ways about it: Dream Theater do not instigate ambivalence. Fans of the band, some of rock's most loyal and passionate, will point to album sales in excess of 12 million and Grammy nominations, whilst revelling in oceans of music revered for its diamond cutter-like precision and lyrical complexity. Naysayers will revile the quintet for those same reasons and bemoan a perceived lack of emotion in over-long tunes delivered by a singer with a vibrato you could drive a bus through. And what's with all those unnecessarily complex swarms of notes?

However, even the staunchest of haters will acknowledge the brilliance of guitarist John Petrucci. If his stunning technique, apparent in his smooth and emotive feel, crushing syncopated riffs and speed-of-light solo runs that defy both belief and gravity, doesn't excite, the ever-growing selection of mouth-watering signature Music Man guitars surely shall.

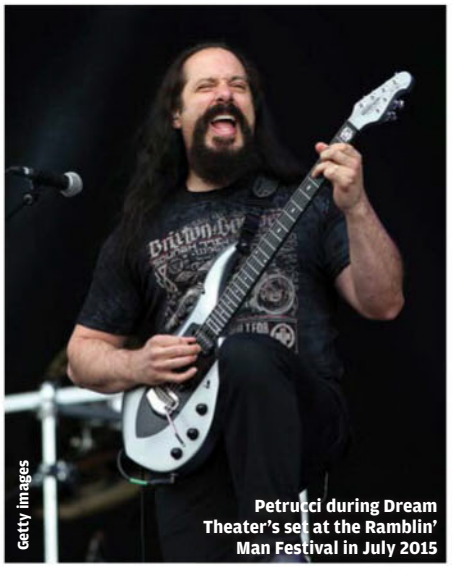
The concept album, too, is an entity that many can embrace or dismiss with equal ferocity but, as *Tommy*, *The Wall* and even the Rush masterpiece *2112* have proved, it's possible for a band to present an absorbing story alongside some pretty special music. With their 13th studio opus, *The Astonishing*, Dream Theater hope to tread the same ground, not only by setting an original story to music but also by playing the entire composition on stage in a pre-planned show.

"It's been a very long, involved, in-depth and complex album project for us," Petrucci tells *G&B* with a laugh. "The process started around two and a half years ago, the idea to do a concept album based on an original story and write a full show's worth of music."

As he goes into more detail, we begin to appreciate just how elaborate the process must have been. Not only did he write the story and most of the music and lyrics, he also produced the album. Oh, and he played a bit of guitar too.

"It's set 300 years into the future, in this world where music isn't made by humans but by artificial intelligence, so it's lost all its depth," he begins. "Nobody plays music anymore, as there's no reason to do so. The aristocracy rules over the inhabitants and things go back to the feudal times – emperors and empires – so it's kind of retro-future.

> "It's set 300 years into the future, in this world where music is made by artificial intelligence"



Getty Images

Petrucci during Dream Theater's set at the Ramblin' Man Festival in July 2015

"Music plays a big role in the story and I also called upon some common themes," he continues. "There's a strong brother relationship, forbidden love and a good against evil element, too, the need for some kind of saviour to inspire the oppressed society to rise up against the establishment."

Spread over 34 tracks, the music is dense and complex with classic DT hallmarks front and centre: a huge guitar tone, some wonderful melodies from keyboard wizard Jordan Rudess, and, yes, James LaBrie's eccentric vocals.

How did John go about marrying the story with the music? "In order for this to be written in the best way, as far as the focus it would require to make this work as a show, we determined that Jordan and I would write together," Petrucci explains, warming to the theme.

"I took the story I had written and the musical bits Jordan and I had collected and, in a very complex and methodical way, mapped everything out over the course of two acts. As we were writing the music, Jordan and I would demo the songs, so they basically existed as guitar and piano demos. Jordan would lay down a synth line for the bass part and we'd be adding choir and string parts: we had the best over- and under-produced demos, albeit without drums and vocals," Petrucci laughs.

Dream Theater have always worked with elaborate soundscapes, but this time Petrucci felt that some genuine orchestration was required. Cue a call to noted conductor David Campbell, who has waved his baton for the likes of Adele, Beyoncé and Beck.

"We often have samples of strings and choirs going in our music, it's part of our sound," says Petrucci. "In a lot of ways, the >

BOOGIE NIGHTS

Petrucci used just one amp for the entire *The Astonishing* album – a very special amp...

"I have a signature Boogie coming out, and I used it on the whole album," says Petrucci, with the air of a proud father. "It's called the JP-2C, and it's basically a reissue of Boogie's Mark IIC+, but modernised. [Mesa/Boogie head honcho] Randall Smith designed it, and tonally it's the first time they've done a real reissue of the IIC+, down to the transformer and circuit board. It just sounds unbelievable and if you like what you hear on the album, it's all that amp."

The original 60-watt Boogie MkIIC+ is especially revered amongst tonehounds, not just because of its massive crunch tone, courtesy of juiced-up IIC lead circuits, but also due to their rarity thanks to a criminally short production period. Introduced in February 1984, they were usurped just 13 months later by the Mark III.

"It's a dream come true and I've just loved Boogie forever, used them on every album and every tour," Petrucci continues, his enthusiasm obvious. "I'm over the moon with it and, with the exception of the limited run of Carlos Santana Mark Is that they did [2013's King Snake combo – Ed], this is Boogie's first real signature amp, so I'm truly honoured."

Petrucci with the JP-2C Signature – the culmination of a 30-year relationship between the Dream Theater guitarist and Mesa/Boogie

writing process as far as that's concerned wasn't too different, it was just now they were going to be all performed by the real deal.

"So, we had all this synth orchestration and MIDI information that we'd send to David as it was completed," Petrucci continues. "He did a combination of taking that and fleshing it out for a real choir and orchestra, and adding his own arrangements in the places where we had nothing. He'd also determine which of it was realistic, as sometimes the range was wrong for certain instruments.

"I will say that, like every step of this process, it was a massive task. There was so much music for him to transcribe and to flesh out, and so many recording sessions that had to be set up; strings, brass, percussion, choirs and all sorts of things. But I really enjoyed the process."

We'd challenge anyone to listen to, for example, the lovely *Heaven's Cove* and not be moved by the mournful choral arrangement; it'd give a table goosebumps. However, let's not forget that underneath all this is John Petrucci the guitarist. Did he ever feel he was getting lost? He pauses for a second or two...

"I think that, as a guitar player, one of the important things that I needed to keep sight of was that the real orchestration would take up a lot of space and that the album could have been swallowed up by a very symphonic sound. It'd be like Dream Theater-lite," he concedes. "So my goal, not only as the guitar player but also as the producer, was to make sure the band retained a hard rock and metal sound through it all." >

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We'd suggest that he's got that balance just about right. Taking *Ravenskill* as another example, an ethereal piano and vocal intro is soon dispelled by a huge guitar riff underpinned by Mike Mangini's machinegun drums. Was that moment akin to John saying 'Hello, I'm still here!'?

"I'm always going to play the way I play, so that was always going to be there. It was how it was utilised that was so important," says John, succinctly.

Presumably, there's more to the process of learning such complex material and getting it up to scratch than John and the band huddling around an iPod.

"Yeah, learning it all is not easy!" he confirms. "First off, it's the volume of material, so remembering what I played, recalling the fingerings, committing that to memory... it takes hours. It's one thing to learn it, but it's another to actually be able to perform it.

"The great thing about this band is that everybody does their homework," he continues. "So we came into rehearsals and were sure that every band member would know the music. We might not play it perfectly right off the bat, but everybody would be ready and prepared. With this album, it needed to flow like a continuous show, so there was a bit more pressure to be able to seamlessly play everything at once."

> "It needed to flow like a continuous show, so there was pressure to be able to seamlessly play everything at once"

There are some real guitar gems to be found in *The Astonishing*, and we mention a few tracks to John. The beautifully melodic lines in *Saviour In The Square* and *Begin Again* contradict any notion of technicians being robotic.

"I approach it like a singer would," he clarifies. "I'm a lyricist, so I'm constantly writing vocal melodies. The melodic ins and outs of chord progressions are always at the forefront of my thinking, so when I'm playing guitar in songs like that, where it's really the voice, I'm almost singing it to myself and it comes out of the guitar."

And would that be the best method for beginners to tackle the same style? "Beginners might not know where those notes are on the guitar or how to pull that off," he suggests, "but if they were to play some progressions and, assuming they were uninhibited, just sing melodies they could very easily come up with something that was flowing and natural."

As with most players who are able to shred with musicality, Petrucci also has some sage advice for those wishing to improve their speed technique. We use sections of *Moment Of Betrayal* and *A New Beginning* as examples of where John really goes for it, but he already has an answer for us. "To me, speed is always at its most effective and impressive when executed cleanly," he says, with a certain amount of steel in his voice.

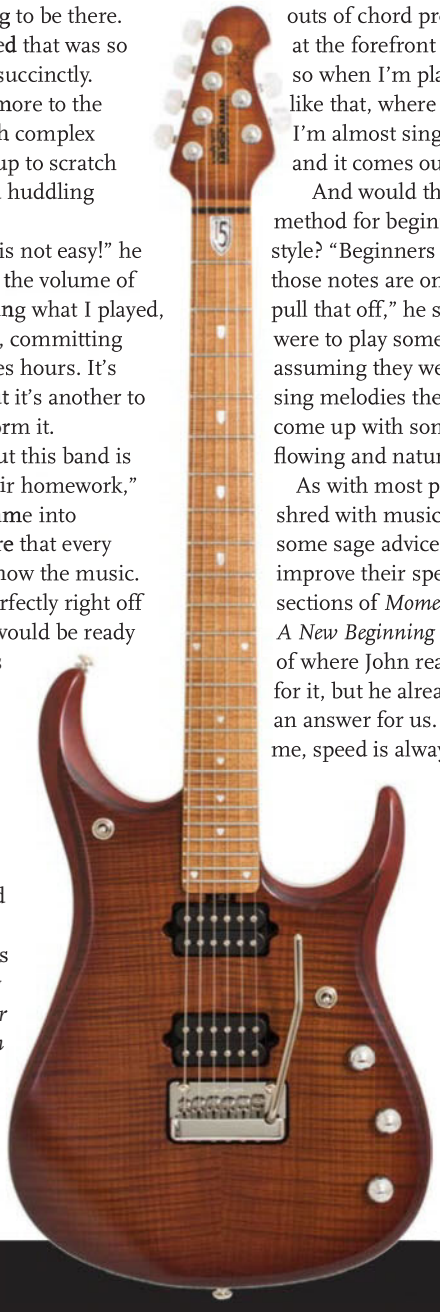
"If you're going to do something within a song that uses speed to drive a section forward or to create some real positive energy, then the cleaner and more precise it is, the more rhythmically accurate it is – that's when speed is at its most musical.

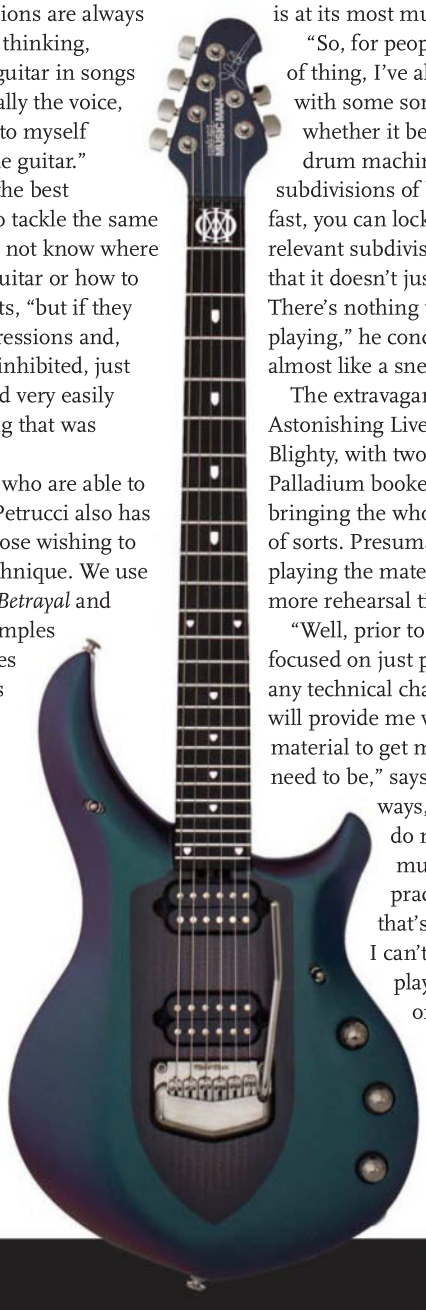
"So, for people practising that type of thing, I've always advocated working with some sort of solid reference, whether it be a metronome or drum machine, and working on subdivisions of beats. So when you play fast, you can lock it in to some sort of relevant subdivision within the music so that it doesn't just sound like nonsense. There's nothing worse than sloppy fast playing," he concludes with what looks almost like a sneer.

The extravaganza that is The Astonishing Live will be premiered in Blighty, with two shows at the London Palladium booked for February, thus bringing the whole process to a close of sorts. Presumably, the prospect of playing the material live will require yet more rehearsal time.

"Well, prior to going on tour I'll be focused on just playing those songs, so any technical challenges within them will provide me with sufficient practice material to get my chops where they need to be," says Petrucci. "In a lot of ways, I don't really have to do more than that, as the music itself becomes a practice schedule, and that's really cool. Anyway, I can't go for too long without playing guitar – it's part of my personality, I guess."

Dream Theater's new album, *The Astonishing*, is out now on Roadrunner.





MUSIC MEN

Petrucci's astonishingly modest guitar arsenal

John Petrucci has been involved with Music Man for many years now, and it's no surprise to learn that he used a number of his signature axes on the sessions for *The Astonishing*.

"I used my Music Man Majesty for the whole album, both six and seven strings," he assures us, "except for one song, *The Path That Divides*, where I used my JP15 – and I really think you can hear the difference. There's a little more midrange to it."

Each year, Petrucci and MM conspire to introduce a new JP model, and we were particularly smitten with 2015's JP15. Alongside a pair of signature DiMarzio Illuminator humbuckers, the guitar features a mahogany body topped with a slab of roasted maple – a first for a JP model. Also new on the 2015 model was the roasted maple neck and fingerboard, so we asked John to talk about these additions.

"I don't really play too many guitars with plain maple necks; I usually prefer a mahogany or a painted neck, something like that," he begins. "But the roasting process brings out all the detail in that maple and gives it that dark stain. It's warm and inviting and, to me, when you're playing and looking down, how a guitar hits you visually is really important. It's inspiring."

And what about the inevitable new signature guitar for 2016?

"The JP16 was recently launched at NAMM and we're really excited about it. It's based on the JP15, but we're bringing the forearm scoop back from the original JP and it's actually going to have a Floyd Rose too, which is something we haven't ever done on my model. It's a deep black Mercedes colour, really sleek, and it's going to be awesome."

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Guitar & Bass LEGENDS

Trailblazer

In a *G&B* exclusive, **DAVID GALLANT** charts the career of the man who paved the way for the great BB King and so many others to follow. This is the story of one of the greatest guitarists ever to live, with recollections from his daughter Bernita

Story **David Gallant**

It's difficult to imagine what the rock and rhythm and blues scenes would have looked like in the 1960s without the influence of one Aaron Thibeaux (T-Bone) Walker. It was he who almost single-handedly brought the electric guitar to prominence as a solo/lead instrument to compete with the horn section of a big band in the 1940s and 50s.

As BB King (a good friend of Walker's) once remarked: "T-Bone really started me to want to play the blues. He was the first electric guitar player I heard on record. He had a touch that nobody has been able to duplicate. He made me so that I knew I just had to go out and get an electric guitar."

> "T-Bone started me to want to play the blues. He made me so I had to get an electric guitar"
>
> **BB KING**

BB not only bought an electric guitar, but went on to develop his own legendary style, based on a lot of Walker's original phrasing and licks. Walker also brought a unique brand of showmanship and stagecraft to his performances, including playing the guitar behind his back and between his legs, which would later become part of Jimi Hendrix's performance. Interestingly, it was not the only thing the two men had in common. Both shared a birthright that was part Cherokee and part African-American.

Aaron Thibeaux Walker was born in Linden, Texas in 1910, and two years later his family moved to the primarily black Oak Cliff area in nearby Dallas. Both Walker's parents were working musicians and their home became the scene of countless jam sessions among family and friends. Walker was thrown into a social circle of musicians that included Lonnie Johnson, Scrapper Blackwell, Leroy Carr and Blind Lemon Jefferson, and by the time he was 10 he was working as 'lead boy' for Jefferson, leading the blind guitarist around the city to play for crowds and passing the hat. When Walker was 13, he left school. As he told journalist Hans Schweitz in 1972: "I travelled through Texas working in carnivals, known as 'medicine shows'. A comedian and I were helping to sell the medicine – we were known as 'Butterbean and Suzie'. I played *Comin' Round The Mountain* on the ukelele and sometimes on the banjo."

Walker took up the guitar when he was 15, and within a year was following Blind Lemon's footsteps and playing to crowds on street corners, making enough money to buy his own meal ticket. But it was the inimitable Johnson, and not Jefferson, who was to become Walker's major influence. At 19, he recorded his first tracks with Columbia Records – *Trinity River Blues* and *Wichita Falls Blues* – under the name 'Oak Cliff T-Bone', T-Bone being a nickname given to him by his mother.

Walker played a Hawaiian steel guitar, which was very popular at the time. The fact that Hawaiian guitars are played on the lap with a steel bar is said to be the reason why Walker later preferred to play his guitar 'flat'.

By the early 1930s, Walker was experimenting with the new electric guitars and their basic amplification, while he continued playing with a 16-piece band formed during his school days. He left the band in 1934 and moved to LA, handing his seat to his young friend Charlie Christian, who had previously shared the stage with Walker in Oklahoma.

By the beginning of 1939, Walker had joined Les Hite's Cotton Club Orchestra as a singer, guitarist and composer playing mostly jazz and blues on the banjo, as even with the advent of amplification it was still >

T-Bone Walker playing a Burns Virginian at the Victoria Hotel in Leicester in 1965

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Walker and his band at the 1965 gig in Leicester

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thought to be easier to hear than a guitar in a big band. Later that same year, he recorded *T-Bone Blues* (this time on amplified guitar) with Hite's band, Walker's guitar sounding surprisingly warm and mellow with obvious echoes of his earlier Hawaiian influences.

Perhaps the most recognisable Walker song of this period was *Call It Stormy Monday But Tuesday Is Just As Bad*, the original title having to be changed from *Stormy Monday Blues*, as the jazz pianist Earl Hines had already written a tune with the same title. Recorded in 1940, it wasn't released until after the war in 1947, because of a shortage of shellac.

"You know it's the most recorded blues contribution in the world and daddy didn't receive a dime in royalties," Walker's daughter Bernita tells *G&B*. "Back then in the 1940s and 50s, there wasn't a lot of signing of papers – you went on a gentleman's agreement with handshakes. And people took advantage of that and daddy wouldn't take time to read contracts; he felt because of who he was people would not take advantage of him. As a matter of fact, although The Allman Brothers recorded *Stormy Monday* quite a number of years ago on a live performance album, Gregg Allman has just released his version and offered to pay a fee."

By the late 40s, Walker's solo star was on the rise, and by all accounts he had a lifestyle that matched his success. Bernita remembers: "Prior to the age of five, my mother and I travelled with him to various places; we did a lot of travel in cars at that time because this was the late 40s. We were always doing family things, travelling, going to the shows. He was a great dad and I never wanted for anything. I had things that I never knew existed. My father had horses. I had a Shetland pony, he had a golden Palomino and my mother had a Pink. The clothes that I wore weren't common, they were designer-type things – we could afford it at that time." But life away from the limelight and home comforts was far from easy, particularly if you were black. "We weren't staying in the hotels," says Bernita, "because they wouldn't allow us to stay in the hotels." There was, however, one exception."When daddy was playing at the Apollo, there was a hotel in New York we stayed at called the Hotel Theresa, up in Harlem. But most times, we stayed with friends of his or those who knew him, who would have businesses, dancehalls, and they would open their homes to us. I remember we often used to stay with the blues guitarist Pee Wee Crayton and his wife Esther and their children – that was up in Detroit. When we were in Texas we stayed with my mother's family."

> "You know, it's the most recorded blues contribution in the world and daddy didn't receive a dime"
>
> **BERNITA WALKER**

T-Bone Walker on stage at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem

Getty images

Racism was never far away, as Bernita recalls: "I remember once when we were travelling in the South and I needed to use the restroom. We pulled into a gas station and I went to use the restroom and I couldn't get in the restroom. When I came back and my father asked the young man, who was caucasian, for the key to the restroom so I could use the restroom, he said: 'We don't serve any – and used the 'F' word – and >

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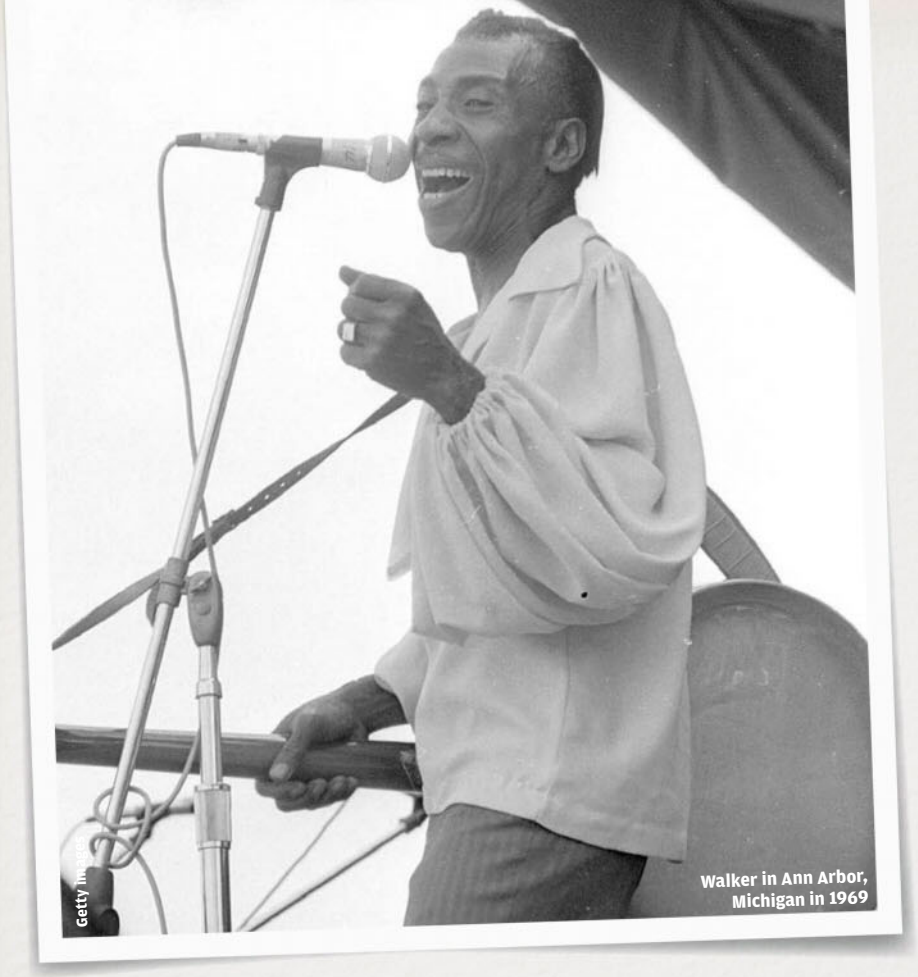

Walker in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1969

you can't use the restrooms'. So my father said, 'stop pumping gas right now and take all the gas you put in my car and take it right out. If my child can't use your restroom, then I don't want your gas'. So the guy opened up the restroom. I could give you story after story...

"At New Orleans airport – I must have been about six – we had flown from Dallas to New Orleans because dad had a gig there, and we didn't get a chance to eat because we were running a little late. I was very hungry and they refused to serve me and he didn't want anything himself; we went out of the airport to a hot dog stand and my father said: 'I want to purchase something for my daughter'. The woman behind the stand said, 'I can't serve you here'. My father had the money, so he pulled out a stack of dollars – 'cos he'd just got paid in cash. So my father said, 'that's not a problem, whatever you want I will pay for, 'cos my child is hungry'. The woman said 'I'm sorry, but we can't serve negroes here'. My father was really, really hurt by that and very upset. I remember he told me not to worry and we'd go to a restaurant to get something to eat. And I was happy, because it would be much more nutricious.

"Racism was a constant thing. Both my parents were from Texas, so it was something they were accustomed to. That was part of the time that we were living in."

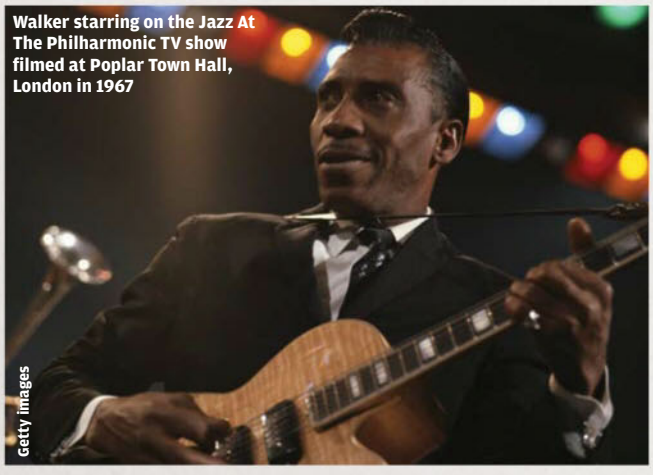
When Bernita was of school age, she saw much less of her father. "My father toured nine months out of the year and was home for three months of the year," she says. "But he called home every Sunday and we looked forward to that call – and sometimes he would call through the week. When we were at school, my brother and I [Bernita had an older brother] only travelled with my father during the Christmas, summer and maybe the Easter holidays." Musicians were always dropping by the Walker household. "If daddy was home on a Saturday or Sunday, they came over to the house – we had jam sessions here all the time. Sometimes, these were musicians from the band. Other times they would be friends of his. And when my father was in the city [LA], he would practise with the Jim Wynn band. Jim had turned his garage into a place where they could come and practise, and I remember my father practising with them on a regular basis."

Walker had been suffering with an ulcer for more than 20 years, and after he had the surgery to remove it in the mid-50s, he started drinking. "It had been something that he couldn't do for quite a long time," says Bernita, "and, of course, his performances suffered."

Walker was playing to mostly black audiences on what was called the Chitlin' circuit, except for when he would play in Hollywood at the Troubadour, down at The Parisian Room in Los Angeles, where LA gangster Mickey Cohen was a regular visitor – "my father was his favourite artist," says Bernita, "...and over in Europe where he was playing to mostly white audiences. In a nightclub, fans want to buy the performer a drink and during that time they didn't have exquisite green rooms. So he would come out and fraternise with the fans, and the fans always wanted to buy him a drink. And daddy was too kind to turn away drinks. He said 'baby I've got to go and have a drink 'cos these are my fans'. And I'd get angry, because they didn't know what it was doing to him... so I just let him go along."

Bernita met many of the musicians who would become stars in their own right. "I met quite a number of them because I was with my father. There were times when I would go to the club with my dad. That was the life that he led. That was my opportunity. As far as going places with him, I've been on stage with him. If it was my birthday, he would get me up on the stand and people would throw the money – and these were notable nightclubs that my father played in."

> "Racism was a constant thing. That was a part of the time that we were living in"
>
> **BERNITA WALKER**


Walker starring on the Jazz At The Philharmonic TV show filmed at Poplar Town Hall, London in 1967

Walker's daughter also remembers the amplifier and guitar her father played: "The amplifier was a Fender – a beige/gold colour. It sat on the floor, a little under a yard tall. His guitar was a Gibson ES-250. He didn't like the ones that Chuck Berry and BB played. He told me they were too thin. You know, that guitar was stolen in Paris during one of his European tours in the mid-60s. They stole it off the stage in between the sets. Gibson never replaced it and they never made another one. We've tried to get them to make one as a memorial."

Walker's time was very much the 40s and 50s, but during the 60s new recording processes and techniques were developed. "One of the hardest things for my father was when the recording

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T-Bone's live performances were unique for the time, and may well have influenced Jimi Hendrix

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studios changed from doing the live performances... They changed to doing the music first and then the artists separately. That was something that my father wasn't very fond of at all, 'cos he was accustomed that as they were doing the recording and they were doing something that he didn't like, or something that he did like that he wanted to put in, they would stop the recording. Sometimes he would pick at the guitar, looking for new sounds and practising techniques and put them in. And it was OK with those that were doing it, as they got it the way they wanted it to be."

Walker was the first blues guitarist to play at New York's prestigious Carnegie Hall.

"He played with Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry... I think it was Ray Brown on bass and I think it was Herbie Hancock on piano," says Bernita. "Yes, Herbie sticks in my mind. There's a video of him coming out and playing with them." She continues: "My father spent a lot of time in Europe because at one point blues wasn't an acceptable form of music in the US, so he had to go where he could make money to take care of us."

Photographer Val Wilmer, who shot Walker on numerous occasions during the late 60s and early 70s, recalls the kind of person he was: "There was an argument going on in the green room of a theatre in Croydon, South London, where T-Bone was playing with a band that included the jazz star Dizzy Gillespie. Dizzy was making mischief until T-Bone walked in. He calmed the whole situation. That was typical of the man."

Bernita also recalls how others have remembered her father, but first puts this into context. "You must remember that my father was a mentor to many artists and he was flattered when they approached him about how to make a certain chord or sound. He was always willing to help and encourage other artists. All the blues artists I've ever spoken to, even after his passing, were always saying 'your dad was the greatest'. Even Chuck Berry mentioned how great a musician he was, and BB King, Bobby Blue Bland and Duke Robillard, all those musicians have said how great my father was, never a harsh word. That's always been really uplifting for me."

> "Even Chuck Berry mentioned how great a musician he was, and BB King, Bobby Blue Bland..."
>
> **BERNITA WALKER**

In his later years, Walker developed arthritis in his hands, "so he would always try to keep things simple and flexible," says Bernita. In an interview in the early 70s, Walker said: "Bobby Blue Bland recorded a version of *Stormy Monday* with Wayne Bennett playing lead – everybody thought it was me."

Sadly, Walker's visits to Europe in the late 60s and early 70s were punctuated by bouts of heavy drinking, and his performances waned as a consequence. He also contracted tuberculosis. But against all the odds, these later years heralded a flurry of activity, with Walker winning a Grammy Award in 1971 for Best Ethnic or Traditional Folk Recording for the album *Good Feelin'*. 1972 saw him appearing in the French film *L'Aventure du Jazz* (later released in the UK as *Jazz Odyssey*), while the album *Fly Walker Airlines Live In Montreux* was released on the Polydor label later that same year.

In 1973, Walker reached the culmination of his recording career with the double album *Very Rare*. It was produced by the songwriting legends Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who assembled an all-star cast of jazz veterans and young studio pros to honour the great bluesman. Sadly, Walker was past his best.

While taking a well-earned rest in his home city of Los Angeles the following year, he was hospitalised with bronchial pneumonia and subsequently died from the disease on 16 March, 1975.

T-Bone Walker was once heard to comment that: "I never got into rock 'n' roll. Guess I don't fit in rock 'n' roll." How ironic it was, then, that in 1987 – in the second year of its awards – Walker was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in the 'Early Influence' category. A fitting epitaph to the grandaddy of modern urban blues and one of the greatest blues (and rock) guitarists of all time.

LISTEN UP

T-BONE WALKER
The Complete Imperial Recordings 1950-54
A collection of recordings made with a big band at the peak of Walker's career, where he swings effortlessly with style.

T-BONE WALKER
Good Feelin'
Although this album reflects the soul of the 60s, Walker's inimitable strident tone and deft licks are very much in evidence.

T-BONE WALKER
T-Bone Blues
This is THE must-have album, with a luxurious remake of *Stormy Monday*. Check out his soloing on *Blues For Marili*.

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These days, John Page designs and builds a small number of custom instruments each year at his forest workshop in southern Oregon, but once upon a time he was on Fender's payroll. Joining the company in 1978, it wasn't long before Page was recognised as a rising star, mentored by the legendary Stratocaster and 4x10 Bassman designer (and performer of the opening glissando on the Looney Tunes theme) Freddie Tavares.

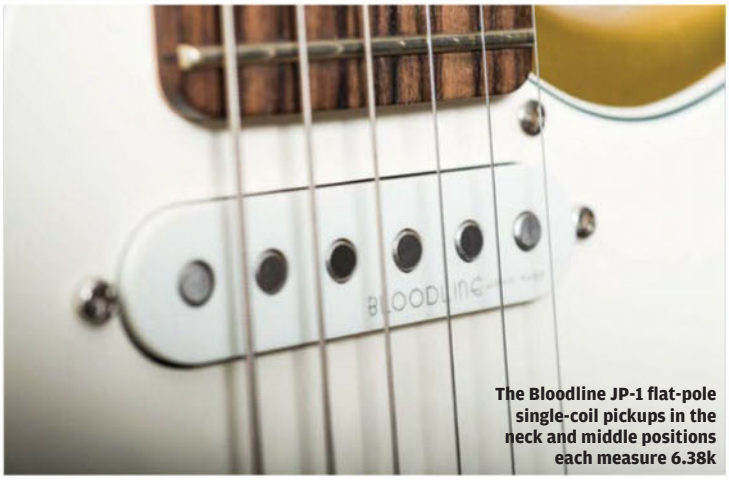
One of Page's early designs was 1981's Fender Bullet, but he is perhaps best known for co-founding the Custom Shop in 1987, heading it up until 1998 and creating instruments for the likes of Pete Townshend and David Gilmour along the way. After a spell as the director of the Fender Museum Of Music & The Arts and a period away from the guitar industry altogether, building functional art furniture, 2006 saw the launch of John Page Custom Guitars. Then, in 2014, Page joined forces with Premier Builders Guild co-founder Howard Swimmer with the aim of creating an affordable production version of Page's Ashburn Classic. Described as 'custom production guitars', John Page Classic instruments also include an Ashburn HH model and the T-style AJ, launched at NAMM 2016.

It's obvious where the inspiration for the Ashburn comes from, but few outside of the Fender organisation can claim to be better qualified to develop an evolved version of the design dreamed up by Leo Fender, Freddie Tavares, George Fullerton and Bill Carson than John Page. And given that he was Custom Shop chief when the first Fender Relics were unleashed on an unsuspecting NAMM Show in 1995, it's fair to say that Page has some experience of making 'em like they used to.

Manufactured in Japan and set up in the US by Page-approved techs, the Ashburn's alder body, maple neck and rosewood 'board construction aren't exactly bold departures, but that's not the point. What Page is aiming for here is refinement rather than reinvention, so you get a body that's even more streamlined than the class of '54, with bulk dressed away from the heel for unimpeded access to all 22 of the 0.095"(w) x 0.045"(h) nickel silver frets.

The neck is attached by a quartet of machine screws with threaded inserts, designed to improve vibration transference, while staggered-height Gotoh tuners negate the need for string trees, reducing friction and thus making tuning more stable and string bends smoother. Meanwhile, the reverse-slanted bridge pickup is positioned to even out any high-end spikes and >

Page is best known for co-founding the Custom Shop, creating instruments for Pete Townshend and David Gilmour



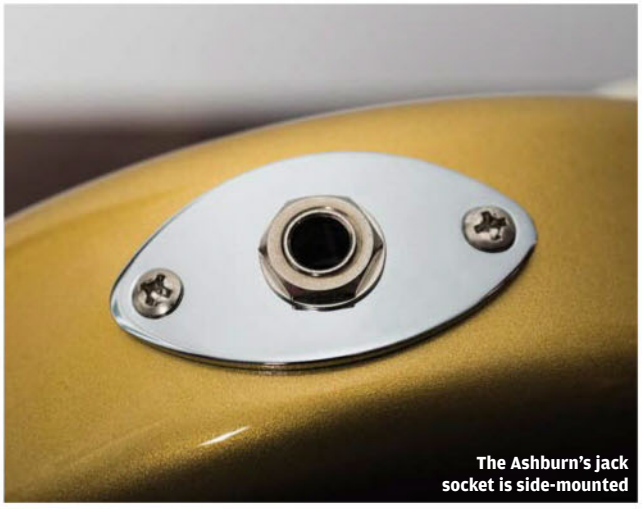
The Bloodline JP-1 flat-pole single-coil pickups in the neck and middle positions each measure 6.38k

KEY FEATURES

John Page Classic Ashburn

- **PRICE** £1,199
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric, made in Japan
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on medium C-profile maple neck, 12" radius rosewood fretboard with bass-side dot markers, 22 nickel silver frets
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh 510 vibrato bridge with 6x bent-steel saddles, Gotoh vintage-style staggered tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Bloodline by John Page single-coil pickups, master volume, master tone, 5-way lever pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 5.5"/647.7mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 50mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.5mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.6lb/3.4kg
- **FINISHES** Shoreline Gold (as reviewed), Black Metallic, Daphne Blue, Fiesta Red, Inca Silver, Olympic White, 2-Tone Sunburst
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **johnpageclassic.com**

The neck is attached by four machine screws with threaded inserts


The Ashburn's jack socket is side-mounted

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
There's no shortage of genuine Fenders bristling with player-friendly tweaks, and the new **American Elite Stratocaster from £1,389** benefits from a compound neck profile and the company's finest noiseless pickups to date. Impressive. Staying well outside of the boutique realm as far as price goes, don't forget that the **American Standard Stratocaster from £1,159** is still a hell of a guitar for around a grand, and it comes loaded with Custom Shop Fat '50s pickups.

focus the bass. It's a compelling recipe, and the 'medium C' neck provides a big ol' playing field that manages to feel quite wide and flat but not excessively thin. The fretwork is neat, the edges of the fingerboard are lightly rolled and the whole vibe would suit a technically proficient lead player who wants something to dig into.

The bent-steel saddle Gotoh 510 vibrato bridge arrived set up from the factory with three springs, a tone and a half's pull-up on the bass side and a tone's worth on the treble side. When it's fully depressed, your strings are so detuned as to almost resemble spaghetti, and the travel is smooth and very musical – just don't lose the Allen key that tightens the small grub screw that secures the arm in place!

Page's Bloodline JP-1 flat-pole single-coil pickups have alnico V magnets and measure 6.38k at the neck and middle positions and 7.38k at the bridge, thanks to an additional 1,200 turns. As the middle unit is reverse-wound, positions two and four are hum-free.

Testing the Ashburn with a variety of valve combos gives the impression of a bright yet smooth modern S-type with woodiness and soul as you dig in

In use

Testing the Ashburn at band levels with a variety of valve combos, including a Swart Atomic Space Tone loaded with a very crisp alnico speaker and the much darker-voiced Tone King Falcon Grande, gives the impression of a bright yet smooth and balanced modern S-type with woodiness and soul as you dig in. It simply loves being plugged straight into an old tweed amp, too, and the simplicity of this signal chain reveals plenty of harmonic complexity.

With more preamp gain from the amp or pedals, having a single master tone control is a genuine boon for lead playing, as it allows you to pick your spot in the mix as clinically as a tennis pro dispatches a volley. Roll the tone control off in position two for a nasal-yet-fluid 'woman' tone, then flip to the bridge and roll it wide open again to step on the throttle. With the neck pickup engaged, try riding the tone with your little finger to add even more expression to a slow blues.

The volume control is a useful colour-changer, too, and rolling it back to clean up acts as a gradual softener rather than an increasingly thick blanket. Into a hard-working 6V6 power stage, using the neck pickup with the tone set wide open and the volume rolled back to about halfway creates a sweet and expressive sound indeed.

The Ashburn isn't necessarily the kind of S-type that you'd turn to first when it's time to get nasty – it's simultaneously smooth and hi-fi, offering arguably more of a cerebral proposition than the white-knuckle fireworks of some vintage originals and vintage-voiced Custom Shop Fenders.

If you pick hard down by the bridge into lashings of spring reverb or echo it will travel back in time convincingly to the late 50s and early 60s, but you need a suitably obnoxious, old-school amp on hand to get there – there's not that inherent spite in this guitar's character. You get the sense that the Ashburn would be better suited to being played by Nile Rodgers rather than Dick Dale, and Gilmour rather than Townshend.

As guitar journalists, it's only natural that we celebrate the period from the early 1950s to the early 1960s as the golden era of electric guitar design, but it's worth reminding ourselves every once in a while that not everyone believes Leo *et al* got it absolutely right at the first time of asking.

There are plenty of players out there who will undoubtedly appreciate the refinements to the time-honoured formula that Page's vast amount of experience has brought to the Ashburn and, as long as you aren't a rip-roaring, uncompromising retro-rocker then we're sure that you'll find plenty of tones to love here. And the best bit is that the Ashburn delivers boutique-level build and performance at the kind of price that won't prove way beyond the financial means of the average gigging guitarist.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Superb value for money
+ Difficult to fault the fit and finish
+ Intelligent approach both to concept and design

- Some may prefer a more vintage-authentic experience

The Ashburn delivers on its affordable boutique promise and then some – an excellent choice for the modern player

9/10

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Gabriel Currie, the man behind Echopark Guitars

ECHO CHAMBER

G&B heads east from Los Angeles to meet the man who builds guitars for Joe Perry, Josh Homme, Troy Van Leeuwen and many other prestigious players...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Chris Vinnicombe & Joe Supple**

It's mid January and Los Angeles is under a haze of grey cloud. Veterans of many tours of duty at the NAMM Show, at this time of year in Southern California Team *G&B* would usually expect to be behind sunglasses, but as we head into the San Gabriel Valley it looks more like rain. That's the poolside cocktails out of the question then; time to do some work. If you can call it that...

No longer based in the LA neighbourhood of the same name, the Echopark Guitars workshop is located 18 miles to the east of the city in nearby El Monte, and we've travelled here with the guys from sole UK Echopark dealer Coda Music to meet Gabriel Currie, the man behind the guitars. A luthier with considerable pedigree, Currie learnt his trade under Leo Fender at G&L in the late 80s, where his experience was "as primitive as it gets in the guitar production world" as he worked his way through the ranks.

In the early 90s, he built Ibanez's USA custom through-neck instruments at Tak Hosono's facility in Glendale, where he was "exposed to the higher-quality building techniques of some of the boutique guitar pioneers of Southern California". Fast-forward to 2012 and Echopark Guitars is born; Gabriel soon counts Aerosmith's Joe Perry, Queens Of The Stone Age's Josh Homme and Troy Van Leeuwen, and Eagles Of Death Metal among his clients.

With a computer-free approach that he laughingly describes as "more ancient-school than old-school", Gabriel's ethos puts a rather different slant on the notion of tone being in the fingers and a greater emphasis than most on the role of the hands in the building process behind a hand-made guitar: "I believe that the more your hands touch a piece of wood that is to become a musical instrument,

The Downtowner Carved Top Custom #1

Exotic fingerboards

An amp on the bench

A very cool La Arroyo

Gabriel builds acoustics too

the more it will respond, resonate and have an energy born into it as it is getting created."

When it comes to a specific commission from an artist, Gabriel likes "to get into the details and find out just what the player's sonic needs are first. Decide what the instrument's voice should be, select the proper raw materials and then I will go over the electronics and neck shape and size, frets, colour finishing... but the neck, frets, voice and weight are the most important details in creating these instruments."

Although Gabriel's designs range from swamp ash bolt-ons to all-mahogany set neck models and high-dollar exotica, something all of the guitars that we play today have in common is that they all sound very good indeed – to the point where each seems to have the more sophisticated voice of an older instrument. Gabriel works closely with Arcane Inc. mainman Rob Timmons, who has also collaborated with James Tyler, Tom Holmes and James Trussart on pickup designs: "Rob and I met a few years ago. I was on the quest for the perfect P-90, or someone who could replicate the dog-ear in my '59 Junior. He was at my shop the next day with several of his offerings. Once he nailed the P-90s, I knew he could do anything. We've designed every pickup that goes into Echopark guitars specific to that instrument, including the Gold Coil standard and humbucker models. He understands what harmonic content truly is and has proven to be a huge part of the Echopark tonal palette."

Finally, as we admire some exotic timbers in Gabriel's workshop, we wonder if he still finds out things that surprise him during the course of a build: "I generally find that the combination of unique wood and amazing component selection yields the best sonic suprises." No surprise there, then. >

ECHOPARK MODEL J £3,499
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Echopark Model J

After spending his formative years learning from the master at G&L, here's Gabriel Currie's collision of two of Leo's finest. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** turns up the reverb...

"I love Elvis Costello and I like a great Jazzmaster bridge pickup," says Gabriel Currie when we quiz him about the Model J. "I wanted to design a new instrument based on the original Clarence but inspired by traditional offset guitars and funky old Teiscos, and still make it a slab of swamp ash, utilising the new Gold Coil and the fine mill work from Mastery USA."

While the Clarence is more of a Tele-meets-Strat hybrid, the Model J brings a big helping of Jazzmaster to the buffet. Given that the 'Telemaster' idea has been attempted by so many luthiers and partscaster builders, and now Fender has weighed in with the American Standard Offset Telecaster, it's nice to see someone going for the opposite configuration and creating a JM-style guitar in a T-type chassis.

The Model J's one-piece swamp ash body has a vintage-style thickness of 1.75 inches and deep, 1957-style contours. There's a hand-carved vibe to the body and pickguard shaping that reminds us this didn't pop out of the end of a guitar-making machine. Laser-like perfection and hand-work don't have to be mutually exclusive, of course, but the home-cooked charm is reminiscent of 1950s Fenders we've played.

The Model J is no featherweight but it certainly sings, with an even acoustic voice and considerably more sustain than any traditionally-appointed Jazzmaster. It's easy to work out why Mastery hardware has become so popular; while old-school JM vibratos tend to offer stability only when used with heavy flatwounds, strung here with Dunlop .010s, the travel is smooth and musical and the guitar returns to pitch perfectly even after serious whammy abuse. Your fretting hand gets a treat, too: the combination of a slim C profile, rounded fret ends and 12-inch radius offers an uninhibited and slinky feel.

The Model J sings with an even acoustic voice and more sustain than any traditionally-appointed Jazzmaster

In use

The bridge pickup is sharp but not shrill, and great for taut riffs and percussive rhythmic playing – whether that's the aforementioned Costello, Wilko Johnson or the funkier end of John Frusciante's back catalogue. Add a pinch of slapback and it'll do a good Luther Perkins, too.

The middle setting is very pretty indeed with a lovely mixture of sweetness and snap that's ideal for clean and lightly driven Hendrix-y noodling around arpeggios and broken chords. If you like to combine thumbed basslines with high-end stabs, it's the perfect voice – just add a little ambience and use the vibrato arm and you're deep into Dan Auerbach's record collection.

The neck pickup brings body and sustain, without losing clarity. While the other settings suit explosive, wiry lead playing, the neck unit copes better with languid blues lead and slide, though like any guitar with so much Jazzmaster in its DNA, you'll have to work for it, wringing out as much expression as you can. Gabriel makes many set-neck instruments with the girth and sustain for swampier, bluesy styles; this is his highly-evolved alt-rocker, and very cool and inspiring it is too.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A more original mash-up of Tele and Jazzmaster than many others
+ Top-drawer parts and components
+ Hip sounds and retro cool without the instability of vintage models

- Body a little heavy, as is the price

If you love Radiohead, Sonic Youth, American lo-fi and post-rock, then the Model J could turn out to be your dream instrument

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Echopark Model J

- **PRICE** £3,499
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric, made in the USA
- **BUILD** One-piece swamp ash body, bolt-on one-piece '59 C-profile rock maple neck with compensated 2.25 degree neck pitch, slab 12" radius Indian rosewood fretboard wth dot markers, 22 Jescar 10850 frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Mastery twin-saddle bridge and vibrato tailpiece, aluminium pickguard, Kluson tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Echopark/Arcane Gold Coil (neck) and J-Master (bridge) single-coil pickups, custom taper CTS 250k master volume and master tone, three-way Switchcraft toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647.7mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 50.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH**: 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 9lb/4kg
- **FINISHES** Gloss nitrocellulose Lake Placid Blue Metallic (as reviewed). Many other finishes and limited custom options available. See website for details
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **echoparkguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Dennis Fano's offset-meets-Tele **Novo Guitars Serus T** **£2,099** blew our minds and our ears last month, while the new-for-2016 **Fender Custom Shop Limited Edition 1958 Closet Classic Jazzmaster** refines the original offset experience with a two-saddle RSD bridge **£3,179**.

Supro 1642RT Titan

The reborn Supro range has tickled us with its crisp crunch but, as **RICHARD PURVIS** finds, this titchy amp delivers deceptively big clean tones too

Most scientists agree the heaviest substance on earth is osmium, at over 22 grams per cubic centimetre – that's about twice the density of lead. The second heaviest substance is whatever the flip this amp is made of. Oof! An ultra-compact 1x10 combo that weighs over 20kg? What is going on in there?

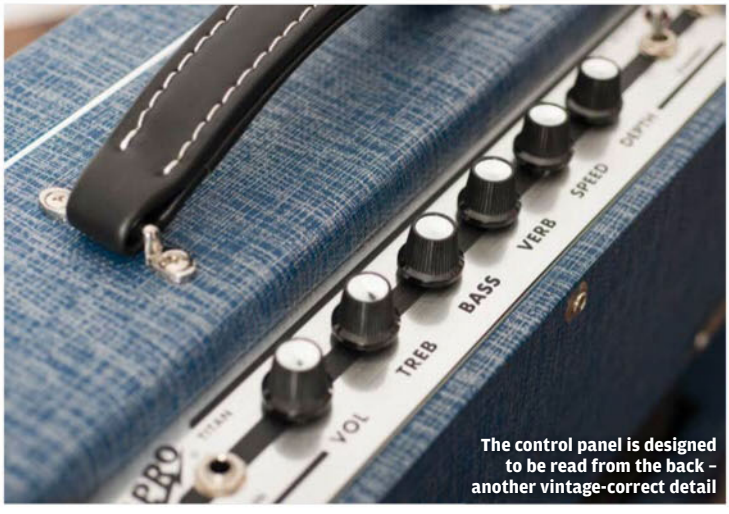
The answer probably has a lot to do with the transformers – because despite being smaller in dimensions than a 12-watt Fender Princeton Reverb, the Supro Titan is a 50-watter. We're struggling to think of many guitar amplifiers that push that much power through a single 10-inch speaker, and the reason for that is it's quite a strange idea – you might compare it to making an enormous three-tier wedding cake then trying to deliver it through a letterbox. To be fair, though, the idea of a small amp with bags of clean headroom certainly has its appeal, and you can always plug in an extension cab if you really want to maximise its room-flooding potential.

We've already reviewed a couple of reissue Supros, but here's a quick bit of background in case you weren't paying attention. Until a couple of years ago, the Supro name was a pawnshop curiosity, one of the 'other' American brands of the 60s saved from obscurity only by brief associations with Hendrix and Page. The new versions have quickly drawn an impressive array of endorsements, from artists as diverse as Joe Perry and Brian Setzer; and while they're not handwired like the originals, they are at least put together in the USA. And they look absolutely bang-on.

This one has a cathode biased Class A output stage using a pair of 6L6s, and includes valve-driven spring reverb and tremolo. It wears the same denim-like 'blue rhino hide' covering as the rest of the range, its silvery grille cloth interrupted only by a vintage-correct Supro logo. Behind the chunky black handle is a metal control panel that's clear enough, except that – the true hallmark of an amplifier with retro intentions – it's arranged for reading from the back, as in the days when guitarists were so shy they used to hide behind their amps.

The back panel is removed easily for access to the circuitry, but changing tubes isn't so simple: they're protected by a metal cage, the screws of which are murder to get at. In fact, three of the preamp valves can't even be seen from the back. They're mounted on a >

We're struggling to think of many guitar amplifiers that push that much power through a single 10-inch speaker

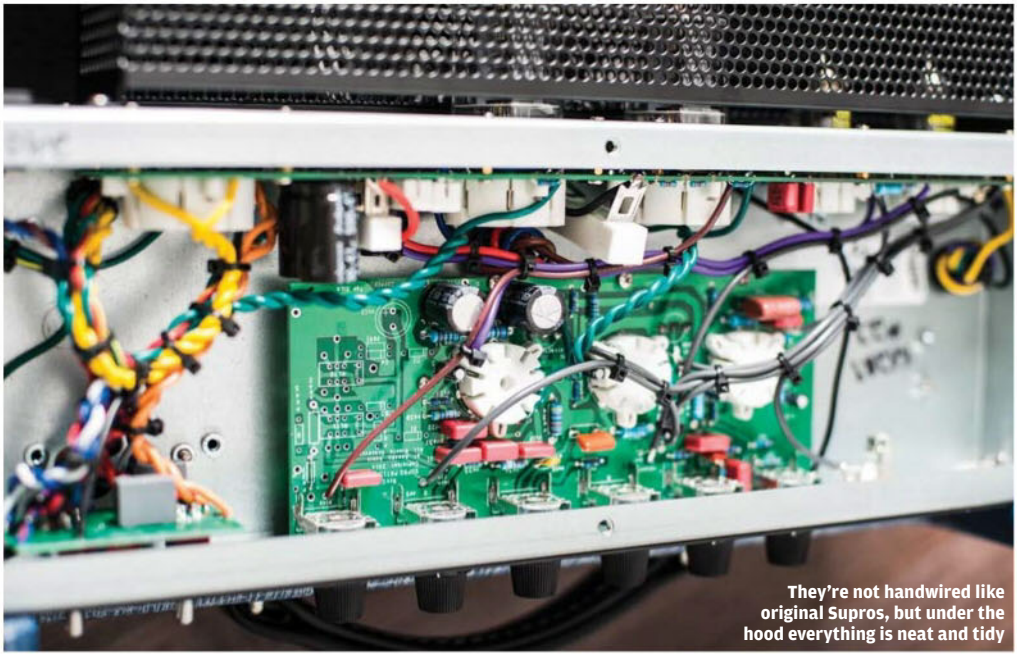


The control panel is designed to be read from the back – another vintage-correct detail

KEY FEATURES

Supro 1642RT Titan

- **PRICE** £1,229
- **DESCRIPTION** 50-watt 1x10 valve combo with reverb and tremolo, made in USA
- **VALVES** 4x ECC83, 1x ECC81, 2x 6L6
- **TOP PANEL** Guitar input; volume, treble, bass, reverb, tremolo speed and depth; standby and power switches
- **BOTTOM PANEL** Footswitch input for reverb and tremolo bypass; 8-ohm external speaker output
- **DIMENSIONS** 490x400x240mm
- **WEIGHT** 21.6kg/47.6lbs
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 0113 286 5381
  www.jhs.co.uk
  www.suprousa.com


They're not handwired like original Supros, but under the hood everything is neat and tidy

The pair of transfomers are a major factor in the Titan's formidable weight

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The Titan's nearest neighbour is the **Supro 1690T Coronado £1,199**, pushing 35 watts from a pair of 6L6s – but that one's a 2x10. Another option for American retro larks is the 30-watt **Magnatone Super Thirty £2,899**, while handwired 60s originals from Supro and other minor marques such as **Sears/Silvertone** are still relatively affordable.

second PCB that hangs perpendicular to the main board, and point forwards towards the speaker baffle.

The plucky 10-inch speaker entrusted with turning all that wattage into decibels is a US-made Supro HP10. It has a hemp cone, which will pique your interest for good reasons if you're a fan of the Eminence Cannabis Rex, and for bad reasons if you're expecting it to give off some sort of mood-altering fumes (it doesn't). There's only one output, so if you do want to run the Titan into a bigger cab you'll have to unplug the internal speaker first – and it's such an awkwardly shaped plug, squeezed into such a tight spot, that this is maddeningly fiddly.

In use

If you make the mistake of switching on the Titan with the volume, treble and bass at halfway or above, you may hear a strange rumble rolling through the earth for a few seconds. The Titan looks like a harmless little thing, but it's no lightweight in any sense of the word.

So if you're looking for a basic bedroom-level starting sound, the volume needs to come down to barely on – and, surprisingly when you consider the size of the amp and the speaker inside it, the bass needs to come down with it. Even with single-coil pickups, you can turn this control nearly all the way off and the tone still has plenty of body; in fact, with a Les Paul's neck pickup it's still a little boomy even with the bass at zero. It seems Supro's engineers have gone out of their way to defy anyone who thinks a 1x10 can't create enough bottom end... and they may have gone just a little too far.

But perhaps the most important thing is the clean headroom, and there is indeed lots of it. Gently pushing the volume back up towards the mid point, the sound gets bigger and bolder, yet remains sweet and organic-sounding, with a twinkliness in the top end to match that low-end thump. It's only when you plug into a larger cab, though, that you really feel the benefit of all that wattage. Through a 2x12 rated at 150 watts, the sound is immense – somewhere between a tweed Bassman and a blackface Twin – and you might even dare to turn up the bass a bit.

Overdrive pedals can sound somewhat stifled through that mellow 10-inch speaker, but here again the extra breathing space afforded by a larger external cab makes all the difference. And as for the amp's onboard dirt? It starts to appear somewhere around two-thirds volume (a little earlier with hot humbuckers, a little later with the 2x12), and it's extremely nice: tight yet smooth, compressing with a Vox-like sponginess that stops it getting ragged or harsh. It is mighty loud, but this is far from a high-gain amp – and the internal speaker starts to squash uncomfortably with big powerchords at full blast.

It's nice to finish on a positive note, and the Titan's reverb and tremolo make that easy. The arrangement of the two circuits – reverb in the preamp, tremolo modulating the bias of the power valves – means you're applying trem to a reverbed signal rather than the other way round. Supro describes this effect as 'haunting' and 'unique', which might be over-egging it a bit. Still, crank them both and you'll create enough atmosphere to open a nightclub on the moon. For every-day ambience, you'll probably want to keep the reverb low, but there's no reason to hold back on the tremolo depth, which ranges from subtle to throbbing insanity. The range of the speed control is more limited than most, but that just means you get usable sounds at both ends.

Supro's engineers have gone out of their way to defy anyone who thinks a 1x10 can't create enough bottom end

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Luscious cleans and smooth overdrive
+ Sounds amazing through a bigger cab
+ Nice reverb and tremolo

– Not quite as portable as it looks
– Voicing is more than slightly bottom-heavy

You may or may not see the benefits of a 50-watt 1x10 combo, but this is a powerful little amp with lots of personality

8/10

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Tone King

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Tone King Falcon Grande

Retro looks, 20 watts of all-valve power, an attenuator, spring reverb and three distinct tones. **HUW PRICE** hails the King

I can't help but admire amps that look like vintage TVs or hi-fi consoles. The Falcon Grande is a prime example, and it's an appropriate match for the Supro-style circuitry here. Tone King describes this as an ultra-linear output stage with cathode biased 5881 power valves and no negative feedback. It's designed to be sweeter, smoother and more rounded in a late-40s or 50s way. Tweakers can also try 6L6s with no need for adjustments.

It's not all retro, though, because the Falcon Grande features very high-grade PCB construction, an integral acoustic lens to eliminate treble beaming and a built-in Ironman attenuator. This reactive device costs around £350 in standalone guise and relies on a set of custom transformers and automatic EQ adjustment to compensate for tonal changes at various volume levels.

With volume, tone, a three-way mode switch and two controls for the onboard spring reverb, there's more going on than first appearances might suggest. Even the two inputs provide slightly different voicings, and the amp ships with a four-button footswitch.

In use

Most of us are used to tweaking effects pedals with our toes while playing, but this is the first amp I've seen that allows you to do the same. Those big knobs may appear to be a retro affectation, but the design makes practical sense – as long as the amp's on the floor.

With only volume and tone controls, the Falcon Grande is an extremely versatile and tweakable amp. As a player who uses tweed amps a lot, I went straight for the tweed preset and felt immediately at home.

There's touch compression, smooth sustain, growling aggression and open treble. However, the Falcon Grande departs from the usual tweed formula because the volume and tone controls aren't interactive.

Roll the tone fully back and crank the volume and you get into some seriously old-school, boxy blues overdrive tones

On amps such as the tweed Deluxe, turning up the tone control makes the amp sound brighter and more overdriven. With this Tone King, you can explore the full gain range using the volume control alone, and the tone control can be set exactly where you want it. But even at maximum with the bridge pickup of a maple-neck Strat, the Falcon Grande never gets edgy.

Roll the tone fully back and crank the volume and you get into some seriously old-school, boxy blues overdrive tones. There's enough upper-harmonic activity to retain clarity, but this amp honks in a snarly sort of way that's perfect for playing contemporary garage-style blues and roots. >

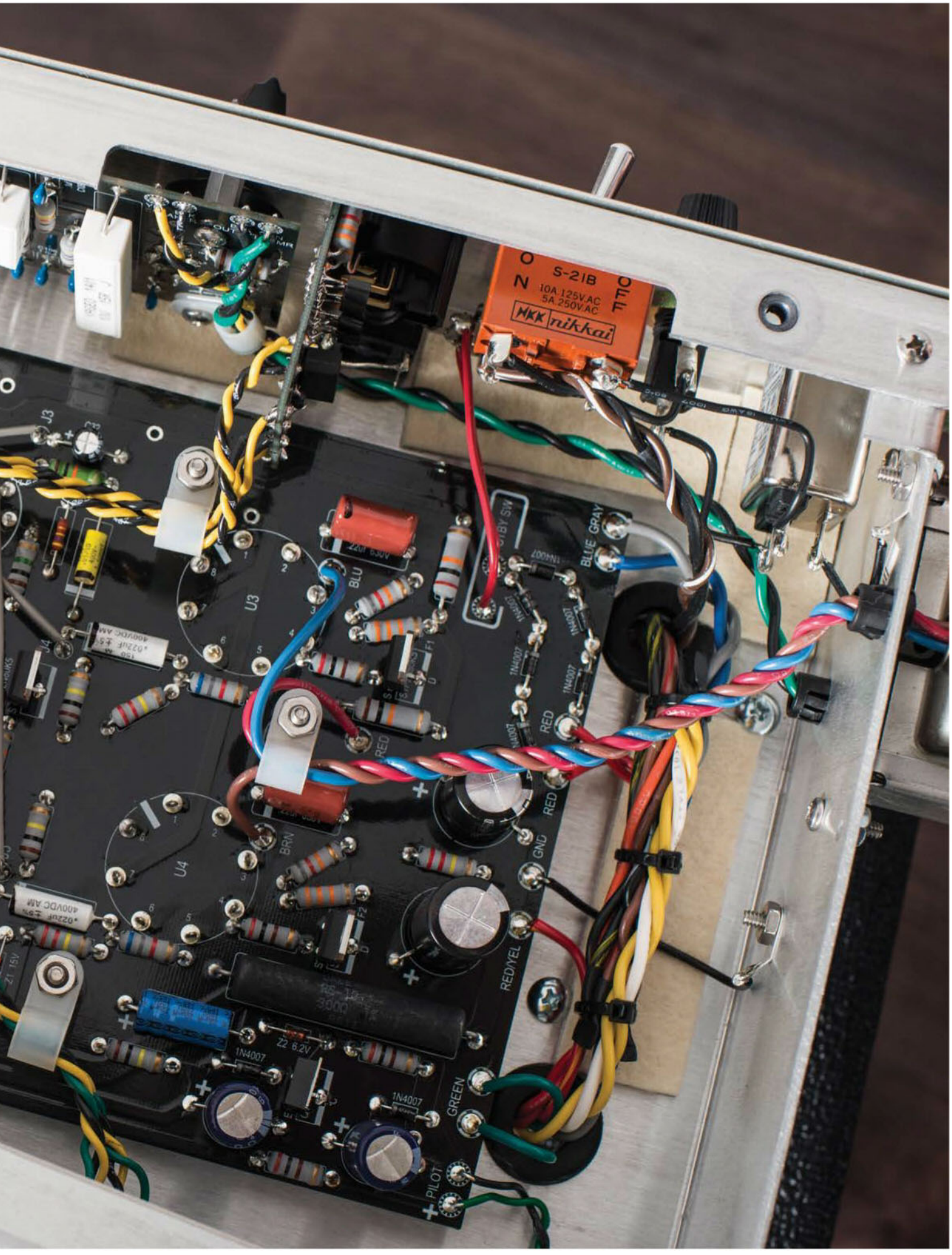
The Ironman attenuator's copper transformers and rectangular white high-power resistors

KEY FEATURES

Tone King Falcon Grande

- **PRICE** £1,999
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel, three-mode, cathode biased valve combo, made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 20W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7, 2x 5881
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input jacks, volume, tone, mode, reverb, dwell
- **REAR PANEL** Ironman attenuator, power & standby switches
- **SPEAKER** 1x custom Eminence 12"
- **DIMENSIONS** 571x482x279mm
- **WEIGHT** 15.4Kg/33.9lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.toneking.com**

The Falcon Grande's components include Mallory 150 capacitors in the signal path, mounted on a high-quality printed circuit board


ON
S-21B
OFF
10A 125V AC
5A 250V AC
MKK nikkai
J3
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U4
BLU
BRN
RED
BLUE GRAY
GND
RED/YEL
GREEN
PILOT
1N4007
Z2 6.2V

The built-in Ironman attenuator is controlled from the rear panel

The Falcon Grande's retro styling evokes the look of a 50s TV or hi-fi

The front-panel controls cover volume, tone, voicing, reverb and dwell

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Gartone Regal 15 £1,650** does for classic British tones what the Falcon Grande does for American sounds. It's a handwired 15/7.5-watt combo with Plexi and Vox-y channels. The **Carr Skylark £1,949** is a 12-watt tweed-inspired combo with TMB tone controls and a built-in, bypassable attenuator.

So much for the extremes. With moderate volume and fairly high tone control settings, the Falcon Grande has the pure, silky and shimmering treble of a medium-power, late-50s tweed. Very minor adjustments to the controls can make a big difference to the degree of compression and overdrive you can find with your fingertips.

Pushing the tweed mode harder moves you though Eagles and yacht rock sustain into a ferocious overdrive that you can moderate by playing lightly or rolling back your volume. So, in essence, this mode gives you a taste of medium-sized tweed tone with extended frequency range and none of the limitations or compromises inherent in 5E3-type circuits.

By this point, I was so taken with the Falcon Grande's versatility, I was wondering why Tone King felt the need for two other modes. Switching over to the rhythm mode provided answers very quickly. In addition to dropping some gain, the midrange becomes less full and up-front, while the bass end tightens up considerably.

The treble remains devoid of glassy shrillness, but there is a sense of it opening out. This is where you'll find your funk, country and jazz tones – staying clean up to halfway, before easing into overdrive. If tweed is 50s mode, then rhythm is the 60s, but both have a softer quality with less attack and punch than mid-power Fender circuits of those eras.

I had expected the lead mode to be simply a hotter version of the tweed setting, but it has a personality of its own. Yes, it's hotter, but it's also crisper in the treble and very much tighter in the lows. There's even a hint of cocked wah to the midrange that works wonders with a Les Paul.

Tweed mode is inescapably retro in flavour, but lead mode has a more contemporary edge at equivalent tone settings. It's hardly alt. rock or metal, but there's a menacing bite that enhances pick attack and helps to retain definition through the pumped-up mids.

If you roll back the tone, lead mode assumes a more vintage and lo-fi quality that works really well for dirty riffing and bottleneck. Flat-out, you can hear the speaker getting involved as it begins to add a hint of extra compression, but it's a world away from the papery rasp of some driven speakers.

My feelings about the reverb are mixed. I had hoped that the dwell control would range from a short bathroom-style decay to something more enveloping. Instead, the decay time doesn't change, but the reverb tone gets brighter and more prominent.

Some may feel that the Falcon Grande's tonal subtlety and harmonic bloom are obscured somewhat by the lushness of the reverb – especially with overdriven tones. To my ears, it works best with rhythm mode – and if cavernous spring reverb effects are your thing, you'll certainly have no cause for complaint.

Personally, I'd prefer to have the attenuator foot-switchable rather than the reverb to bump any one of these modes up for soloing without adding overdrive or altering the tone. Tone King's Ironman attenuator has justifiably earned plaudits, and having it integral to the amp adds considerable value. Being able to use it as a pseudo boost might add even more.

Considering that the three modes share the same volume and tone controls, it's remarkable how compatible they all are. Although tweed and lead are both louder than rhythm, there's not that much level difference between them, yet each sounds distinct and performs a specific range of functions. This can work only when expert electronic engineering combines with a core amp tone that's pretty special. The Falcon Grande has both in spades.

With moderate volume and fairly high tone settings, the Falcon Grande has the pure silky treble of a late-50s tweed

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Amazing range of sounds
+ Gorgeous clean and filthy tones
+ Big reverb effect
+ Footswitchable modes
+ Excellent attenuator
+ Extremely portable

– Slightly soft response
– Treble doesn't quite reach Blackface levels
– No effects loop

It might not have quite enough of the cut and punch that some players need for live playing, but for smaller gigs, recording and home practice the Falcon Grande is absolutely outstanding

9/10

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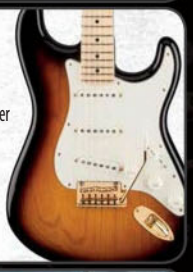

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Award-Session BluesBaby 22

Valve amps might not be around forever... but do we really need them anyway? **RICHARD PURVIS** catches the whiff of a solid-state revolution...

Once, there was a war between good and evil. On the good side were the valve amps: heavy, expensive and sometimes unreliable, but with the pure tone of rock 'n' roll. On the evil side were the solid-state impostors, lighter and cheaper but stereotypically harsh and sterile in sound. Digital modelling amps muddied things a little by being one cleverly disguised as the other, but if you were any sort of tonehound you always knew which side you were on.

Well, you did until now. There are some distinguished engineers who think we've had it wrong all these years – that it's not the valves themselves that make tube amps sound so good, but the way the circuits are designed around them – and Stewart Ward is one of them. Back in the 80s, his Sessionette 75 was one of the few transistor amps that some people actually liked, and now he's back in the game with a much advanced design known as the BluesBaby. This simple 1x12 combo wouldn't know where to hide if a valve knocked on its front door, and yet – spoiler alert for the rest of the review – it sounds rather brilliant.

The BluesBaby is Ward's valve-free attempt to recreate the sound of the Fender Blues Junior, a target chosen because of its status as a compact and affordable modern classic. It's slightly cheaper than a Blues Junior, and also lighter despite its similar dimensions, but a rating of 22 watts means it should be able to compete for raw volume.

How can it compete for tone, though? Well, it's all about the power amp. This is an LM3886 integrated circuit, capable of generating up to 68 watts but restricted to 22 here for cool-running reliability, and with a limiter to avoid nasty distortion. But the most important difference from the old Sessionette 75, we're told, is the use of 'constant current' drive to ensure consistent power through the speaker at all frequencies... just like you get from the output transformer in a valve amp. This is not a new technology, but it is new to Session – read the interview over the page for Ward's explanation of why it's so important.

Made in the UK, the BluesBaby comes with a range of finish and speaker options; ours has the 'antique' lacquered cabinet with oxblood grille, a £30 upgrade and the standard Celestion G12 V-Type speaker. Rated at 70 watts, this is an all-rounder described (not terribly helpfully) by Celestion as 'modern vintage'; you can specify various other G12s for up to £79 more. Reverb is standard, and comes courtesy of a nine-inch Accutronics tank tucked into the bottom of the cabinet. That bare lacquered plywood reminds me of some of my dad's DIY projects, but if you don't have such associations then it is a smart look, combining a subtle shine with something like the golden warmth of aged tweed. White chickenheads on a black control panel do the job in timeless yet practical style, and but for one shaky screw our review amp was put together immaculately.

The reason it's so very light becomes apparent once you've unscrewed the back panel for a look inside the chassis... and seen the huge space where a valve amp's output transformer would be. There is a toroidal mains transformer, a small circuit board for the preamp and an even smaller one hosting that power amp chip, but not much else. You could play tennis in there.

The layout of the top panel follows the template of the Blues Junior: preamp volume with a 'fat' button, three-band EQ section, master volume and reverb. But on the underside of the chassis you'll also find a couple of sneaky toggle switches: one for a presence boost, and one labelled 'blackface' that shifts the focus of the mids control for a 1950s-to-60s character tweak.

The BluesBaby pops instantly to life – no valves to warm up – and it becomes clear we're dealing with a 'real' amp

The top-panel controls sit tidily atop the 'antique' lacquered plywood cabinet

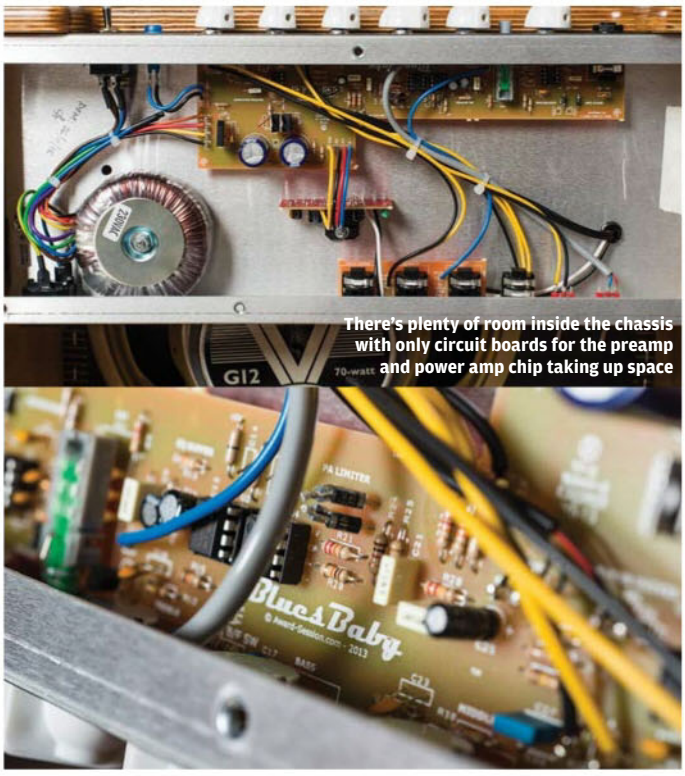
In use

The BluesBaby pops instantly to life – no valves to warm up, of course – and it becomes immediately apparent that what we're dealing with here is a 'real' amp. With the reverb off and all the other controls at noon it's a big sound, balanced perfectly, and quite crunchy even with fairly low-output single coils. There's an element of boxiness, as you might expect from such a compact combo, but turn the mids down to >

KEY FEATURES

Award-Session BluesBaby 22

- **PRICE** £429 as reviewed (£399 with standard finish)
- **DESCRIPTION** 22-watt solid-state 1x12 combo with reverb, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Top panel: guitar input; fat switch, treble, bass, middle, master and reverb; on/off switch. Rear panel: Blackface and presence switches; inputs for aux/mp3, fat and reverb footswitches; 8-ohm external speaker output
- **DIMENSIONS** 460x420x250mm
- **WEIGHT** 11.3kg/25lbs
- **CONTACT** Award-Session **award-session.com**



There's plenty of room inside the chassis with only circuit boards for the preamp and power amp chip taking up space

around 3 and it gets surprisingly glassy. The break-up is totally sweet and natural.

Pulling the preamp volume down a bit gives us American-style cleans that will compete with a Blues Junior any day. It can sound a little flat with the master volume below 5, and hissy with it pushed past 8 or 9, but there's a fat slice of 'just right' in the middle. And speaking of fat... that little button adds a whopping thump of controlled power to the low end. Your skinny single coils will leap up and kiss you with gratitude.

The two switches round the back, while not quite so dramatic in effect, are every bit as useful. Engaging presence adds a sweet click to your note attack – perfect for a Les Paul, don't let it anywhere near a Jaguar – and the blackface switch takes out some lower-mid clonk for a purer, leaner tone. Between these controls and the three-band tonestack, you won't struggle to get the best out of just about any guitar.

So, we started with the preamp at halfway and then turned it down... what happens if we turn it up? Is this where the non-valve pretender comes unstuck? Erm, no. The fact that a solid-state preamp can produce smooth and organic-sounding distortion shouldn't come as a shock – it's what many of our favourite stompboxes do for a living, after all – but there's nothing like the creamy and responsive overdrive of a cooking amp, and that's exactly what the BluesBaby delivers. It's totally addictive and totally tweed.

The spring reverb sounds immense and you can make it do that 'pi-choinnggg' noise by rocking the amp on its back feet and letting it fall, a trick that's beyond the powers of any digital emulation – plus there are a couple of handy footswitch inputs on the back that add to this combo's gigging versatility: one for the reverb and one for the fat switch. You'll still need an overdrive pedal for proper clean/dirty switching, though.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Totally convincing 'valve' tones, both clean and overdriven
+ Compact and light, yet powerful
+ Clever switches add genuine versatility
- Quite noisy when you push the master volume

Who cares whether it's full of valves, transistors or mouldy profiteroles? This is a superb-sounding combo at a very competitive price

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Solid-state guru Dave Petersen isn't currently making amps, but his **Shere Sound Firefly £695** is still available. The **Vox AC15VR £335** is an affordable valve/tranny hybrid combo, and let's not forget the BluesBaby's all-valve inspiration, the **Fender Blues Junior £490**.

Award Winner

Stewart Ward is the man who wants to throw all your beloved valve amps into a skip. We asked him to explain himself...

Q What's the story behind the BluesBaby?

"In 2012, I noticed at a local jam that everyone was using Fender Blues Juniors, and I said to a friend that I could make an amp that sounded just as good, but using transistors. My claims were rubbished, so the next day I started to design the amp. My first working prototype cost me £500 and 1,050 hours to bring together from scratch; the BluesBaby I now make is not much different to that first one."

Q What is constant current speaker drive, and why is it so important to what you're doing now?

"That is such an important question, because constant current drive puts solid-state amps into the valve amp league. It's a form of extra negative feedback in the power amp that enables precise mimicking of a valve amp with an output transformer – it's the transformer that facilitates a valve amp's final tone and loudness over solid-state amps, not the valves. Speakers do not have a constant impedance over the entire frequency spectrum. This means power output can vary with frequency in many older solid-state designs, giving rise to their so-called 'cold' tone. Constant current drive allows the amplifier to increase or decrease the output voltage across the speaker with respect to frequency, to compensate for that changing impedance. This results in a constant power output into the speaker at any frequency. Eureka: we end up with a transistor power amp that performs exactly like a valve amp with an output transformer."

Q Do you think amps like this, and digital modelling, will eventually lead to valve amps becoming extinct?

"They could seriously reduce the market for valve amps, and force up retail prices. Could most players hear the difference? And you have to keep spending money to keep valve amps running... and reduced sales could lessen the demand for valves, so the cost of production would rise dramatically. You can see where this might end. At the end of the day, there's nothing new left to do with valves. Yes, there's loads of boutique amp builders, but they simply recreate old valve amps and dress them in new clothes. There's no future in that! The BluesBaby *might* be the turning point the market needs – but customers will decide that. I thought long and hard about making amps again, but this could be what 90% of guitar players want – and I'd be happy with 5% of the Blues Junior's market! If Session disappears in a year, we'll know I got it wrong."

Q And if it does go well? Are there any plans for bigger models?

"I do recognise the need for a 40-to-50-watt model – something with enough welly to play clean and enough grunt to make the basis of a good amp for pedals. There's even a little scope for my interpretation of some well-known British amps... maybe! I think the market is bereft of decent-quality basic amps that do what they say on the tin at a reasonable price.

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Rift Amps PT20 & Plexi 18

The hand-made Rift PT20 and Plexi 18 are new twists on classic designs. **HUW PRICE** tries an 18-watt dirt box and a thriller in vanilla

Chris Fantana started out as a session guitarist, and having learned how to service and modify his own amps, he turned his hand to building them for fun. Fast-forward several years and Chris's hobby has blossomed into a full-time business.

With 15 base models to choose from, customers can customise their amps by selecting various options and upgrades from drop-down menus on Rift's website. Rift amps are built by hand with components that tick all the boutique boxes, but the pricing remains extremely competitive and they come with a lifetime guarantee for the original owner.

PT20

Covering a 60s-style cabinet in tweed is a clear signal of intent. The PT20 is a re-imagining of the Princeton Reverb template, with cathode biased 6L6 power valves for 20 watts of power and a 12-inch speaker. Onboard reverb and tremolo combine with an amplifier design derived from wide-panel tweeds.

In use

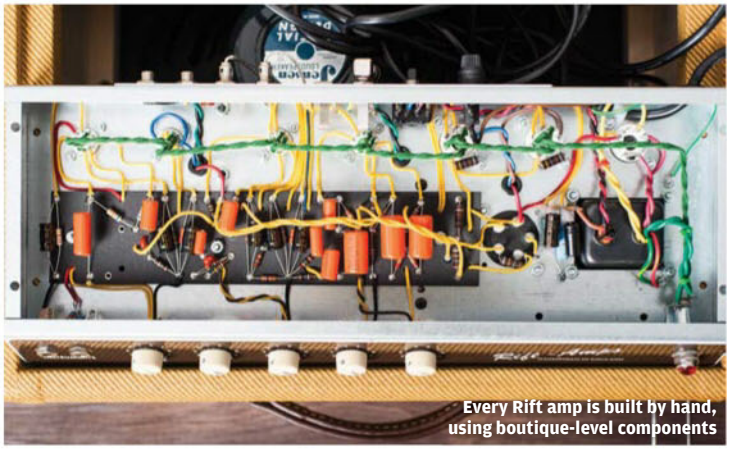
We often use the term 'clean headroom' in amp reviews, and we can deal with that succinctly here: the PT20 doesn't really have any. In classic tweed-style, the tone knob doubles as a level and gain control, so with a fairly standard treble response the volume control hits the overdrive point almost immediately – even with single coils.

A Jensen P12Q is standard, but a Celestion Gold is available as an upgrade, and I gave one a try. The Gold's higher efficiency, coupled with its extended treble response gave the PT20 a tad more clean headroom, but if you want cleaner tones turning down your guitar is the only way. Even so, this amp is mostly about saturated overdrive tones that veer from mellow to full-on hooligan mode. Swapping back to the Jensen, you get a more papery rasp, which adds fuzzy grit to an already heavy overdrive. Think Neil Young in the early 90s and you'll be in the ballpark.

With the Celestion, the PT20 is louder, clearer and marginally less fierce. The Gold also opens out the treble to reveal the delicious shimmer inherent in these tweed-style circuits. The dynamic response is nicely pliable but never too soft, and the bass end holds together well – even with humbuckers.

Maybe it's my sound engineering background, but I'm fussy about reverb and I prefer it when the reverb effect and guitar sounds blend but remain distinct. Rift's reverb is one of the good ones because it steers clear of the upper harmonics. You can add bucket-loads >

This amp is mostly about saturated overdrive tones that veer from mellow to full-on hooligan mode


Every Rift amp is built by hand, using boutique-level components

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PT20

The **Carr Sportsman** **£1,599** combines 50s-style USA power valve overdrive with onboard reverb, a TMB tone stack and a variable headroom control. The **Lazy J 20** **POA** takes the late-50s tweed Deluxe format and runs with it and comes with optional reverb and tremolo modules.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Plexi 18

The **Gartone Regal 15** **£1,650** is a two-channel 15/17.5W combo with a Vox side and a Marshall side, plus reverb. **Marshall**'s **Handwired 1974X** combo **£1,649** has a Celestion T1221 speaker and a tremolo channel.

to create huge three-dimensional ambience, but the guitar sound somehow remains clear. As for the tremolo – it's deep, throbby and playable with a Leslie-like 'ramp up' when you hit the footswitch.

Plexi 18

From the front, the Plexi 18 looks like a regular 18-watt clone, but the control panel reveals it's more like a low-power JTM45. This type of amp is known as a TMB – for the treble, middle and bass controls. The Plexi 18 goes one better, with a second independent channel. Fantana has also made some small but significant tweaks to the bias components.

In use

Although much of the signal path is shared, the sounds are distinctive enough for the Plexi 18 to qualify as a bona fide two-channel amp. If you're in the market for an 18-watt TMB, your overriding priority is likely to be Marshall JTM45-style overdrive at socially acceptable volume levels. Starting on the TMB channel, that's exactly what the Plexi 18 delivers.

With a Les Paul and a 10ft cable, this amp shifts into top gear before the volume control reaches halfway. Go higher and you'll pass through two or three sweet spots – especially around 8, where the speaker starts to get involved, adding a hint of fizz and articulate bite.

Bearing in mind that our review amp is loaded with an all-original vintage G12M Greenback, the tone is sweet in the treble, smooth in the mids and fast but full in the lows.

The EL84s, Celestion speaker and transformers create a smooth treble, growly lows and a compressed midrange bark. The Plexi 18 doesn't do ethereal tweedy treble, but I didn't hear any of the high-gain fuzziness that can be an irritant with some Marshall-style circuits.

The tone controls may simply provide variations on a theme, but it's a wide variety and you should explore the full range. With all three at noon, you get a very balanced tone with full lows and jangly treble. Dropping the bass and cranking the treble and middle gives you an aggressive, pushed mid tone with very clearly defined pick attack and string separation.

Floor the treble and middle then boost the bass and you get an old-school boxy honk – feed in just a hint of treble for enhanced definition and you could be busking on Beale Street.

At equivalent settings, the 'tone' channel has less gain, more midrange focus and a darker woodiness. You can hear the treble jangle, even with the tone set halfway, and you can sense that the signal path is more 'straight through' because the dynamics of the amp and guitar seem more connected.

Both the volume and tone controls affect the level, as well as the frequency response. Turning each one up individually increases volume and treble, but with differing effects on the gain and midrange. Suffice to say, this channel is no mere add-on, and I like it just as much as I do the TMB channel.

The influences behind these amps are unambiguous. However, Rift has forged ahead and added extra features that were never associated with vintage low-power plexi and tweed amps. The 18-watt Marshall has become hugely popular, but for many fans the ultimate version is the one with the JTM45-style control layout. Therefore, it's somewhat perplexing that Marshall has never produced an 18-watt TMB. Similarly, there are players out there who adore 50s Fender tones and 60s-style reverb and tremolo in equal measure but, again, the progenitor appears oblivious.

The Plexi 18 succeeds in delivering everything wonderful about 60s Marshall tones at sensible volume

So, in essence, the Plexi 18 succeeds in delivering everything wonderful about 60s Marshall tones and more besides at sensible volume levels. As for the PT20, you get the onboard effects associated with mid-powered Fender amps, coupled with the more visceral thrill that comes from Fender tweeds.

These amps may look like expertly constructed kits, but Chris Fantana's clever innovations are to be found inside rather than out. As handwired valve amps go, they're fantastic value for money and they can cut it with the best sonically, too.

A Jensen P12Q is supplied as standard in the PT20, but it's worth trying a Celestion Gold

KEY FEATURES
PT20

- **PRICE** £1,299
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel, cathode biased valve combo with spring reverb and tremolo, made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 20W
- **VALVES** 1x 12AT7, 2x 12AX7, 1x 12AY7, 2x 6L6, 1x GZ34
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input jacks, volume, tone, reverb, speed, depth
- **SPEAKER** 1x Jensen P12Q
- **DIMENSIONS** 43x51x 22cm
- **WEIGHT** 15.3Kg/33.7lbs
- **CONTACT** Rift Amps 07762 767128 **www.riftamps.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Delivers easy overdrive and distortion
+ Very touch responsive
+ Excellent reverb voicing
+ Highly playable tremolo
+ Footswitch included
+ Lifetime warranty
+ Nicely portable

– Offers very little clean headroom

Touch-sensitive tweed overdrive tones that are enhanced by heart-throbbing tremolo and an outstanding reverb

8/10

KEY FEATURES
PLEXI 18

- **PRICE** £1,295
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel cathode biased valve combo, made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 18W
- **VALVES** 3x ECC83, 2x EL84, 1x EZ81
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input jacks, volume, tone, treble, middle, bass
- **SPEAKER** 1x Celestion Heritage Greenback 12"
- **DIMENSIONS** 51x62x23.5cm
- **WEIGHT** 18.8Kg/41.4lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Plexi tones at sensible volume
+ Touch responsive
+ Two different but equally fine channel voicings
+ No nasty fizziness
+ Lifetime warranty
+ Very portable

– Fixed output power

A JTM45 tone stack combined with a medium-power EL84-driven power amp is a winning combination. Plus you get a second channel that sounds entirely different but just as good

9/10

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Yerasov Blackspace & Gavrosh 10

Small is beautiful this month as we check out a pair of mini marvels from Yerasov. **HUW PRICE** goes head to head...

Yerasov Amplifiers has quietly been carving itself a niche for affordable, solidly built all-valve guitar amps. The range includes retro-inspired combos as well as fully featured metal heads and cabinets, some of which are wired point to point. This month, we're testing a pair of very different mini heads.

Blackspace

The specs state clearly this 20-watt valve head is "specifically designed to add real tube sound to processors, preamps and pedalboard setups". Speaker outputs are provided for 4- and 8-ohm cabinets alongside a line input for processors and preamps.

The equalisation controls include volume, treble, middle, bass and presence. Given the retail price, you may be pleasantly surprised to learn that the Blackspace is completely handwired on turret board with chassis-mounted ceramic valve sockets.

In use

This amp is designed for a very specific purpose, so you shouldn't expect 50 shades of filth or radical tone shaping. This is first and foremost a pedal platform, so we're talking clean headroom, refined but full frequency equalisation plus a punchy and solid dynamic response. Blackface characteristics, even?

I soon discovered those 20 watts can move a lot of air, but some careful tweaking is necessary to get your guitar 'talking nice' with the amp. Rather than go for broad brush strokes, it's more helpful to approach the Blackspace's tone controls like a studio equaliser.

The Blackspace retains its clean composure until the volume control reaches around 75 per cent, at which point a mild degree of overdrive begins to take over. Breakup occurs a tad earlier with humbuckers, but there's still plenty of clean volume and the overdrive has a slightly smoother and warmer quality. You can use a compressor to soften a lively transient attack, but I can't think of a pedal that can add punchiness to a saggy amp. This ought to make the Blackspace's solid-state rectification and lively attack preferable for pedal platform duties.

There is a way to dial out some of the spikiness from single coils; try turning the treble all the way down and max out the presence, then dial back in a little of the treble. Increasing the presence doesn't lower the clean headroom, but it compresses the transient attack just enough without losing clarity.

We're talking clean headroom, refined but full frequency equalisation plus a punchy and solid dynamic response

The clean tones are more neutral than characterful, but venturing into >

The Gavrosh 10 has three ECC83s, a 12AT7 and a pair of EL84s under the hood

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Blackspace

Although not all will have the Blackspace's build quality, alternative heads include the **Vox AC15CH £516**, **Egnater Tweaker 15 £324**, **Egnater Rebel 20 MkII £484** and the **Orange Tiny Terror £384**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gavrosh 10

Alternative high-gain mini heads include the **Engl E315 £379**, **Marshall DSL15H £457**, and the **EVH 5150 III 15W £430**. Check them out for built-in attenuators, effects loops and low-power modes.

overdrive territory does allow some of the valvey colouration to show itself. To my ears, the most obvious sonic reference point would be the clean channel of a mid-powered Fender because the overdrive mostly rounds out the underlying cleans.

It's fairly responsive to playing dynamics and quite engaging on its own. Fortunately, things get even better with pedals and the Blackspace really allows the sonic characteristics to come through.

The line input feature isn't something you can use to jam along with backing tracks from an mp3 player because plugging into the line input mutes the guitar input. The Blackspace's volume and presence controls remain active, but the other tone controls are disengaged.

However, you can plug a processor straight in to add some genuine tubey goodness to modelled sounds. In this application, the Blackspace produces a very big and clear tone, but some fine level balancing may be required to stop microphonic pickups from squealing.

Gavrosh 10

Most practice amps tend to be fairly simple affairs with very few features. Not so the all-valve Gavrosh 10 head, because you get two channels, 2/10-watt power switching, CD input and an internal power soak that emulates a guitar cabinet for routing preamp valve overdrive into headphones. The channels share bass, middle, treble and presence controls, along with digital reverb. You can switch channels on the front panel or use the supplied footswitch.

In use

This one covers an awful lot of ground with clean, overdrive and high-gain tones. In clean mode it's fairly similar to the Blackspace, but it shifts into a nicely rounded overdrive a bit sooner. The tone controls are powerful, but overall I find the sound slightly on the bright side.

It also sounds as if the frequency points of the middle, treble and presence control are fairly close together, so going beyond halfway with any of them accentuates the inherent brightness. I ended up rolling the treble back and lifting the treble to tame the shrillness.

If multi-channel amps are to share the same tone stack, the fundamental sound has to be very well voiced, so only minor adjustments will be needed. Overdrive accentuates the Gavrosh's brightness, but once you roll off more treble, you can get very nice tones at low-to-medium gain.

A panel switch activates high gain mode – and it's the sound of shred. The gain really is massive and when you turn down the master volume there is a fizziness that sounds more like the diode clipping of high-gain Marshalls. To minimise the fizz, try flipping to 2-watt mode rather than attenuating the level using the master volume.

The reverb will be a bit over the top for some tastes. The decay is quite long and the effect comes on very quickly. Long before the control reaches halfway, the guitar tone becomes swamped by the effect. It's nice, though, to have reverb on a practice amp, even if it does work best with cleaner and more moderately overdriven tones.

Overall, the vibe is fairly 80s, but that's no bad thing. Those seeking old-school tone should probably look elsewhere, but you're likely to be able to dial in something you enjoy.

The line input works nicely, but your media player will need its own volume control because input on the Gavrosh is fixed. You won't get hi-fi quality for your backing track, but it's a convenient solution. The headphone socket doesn't kill the power amp output, so you have to flip the speaker switch to silence the Gavrosh, but the tone is very enjoyable through headphones.

Both these amps are built to a far higher standard than is usual at this price point. The styling might be a dated, but both sound decent, there's no shortage of features and if they had been made in the USA, you might expect to pay significantly more.

Most practice amps tend to be fairly simple affairs with very few features. Not so the all-valve Gavrosh 10 head

The Blackspace has 4- and 8-ohm speaker outputs on its rear panel

KEY FEATURES

Blackspace

- **PRICE** £486, plus delivery
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel, handwired valve head with external line input, made in Russia
- **POWER RATING** 20W
- **VALVES** 2x ECC83S, 2x 6V6
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input jacks, presence, bass, middle, treble, volume
- **REAR PANEL** 4- & 8-ohm speaker outputs
- **SPEAKER** N/A
- **DIMENSIONS** 380x235x200mm
- **WEIGHT** 9.1Kg/20lbs
- **CONTACT** 07534 429269 www.yerasov.co.uk

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Loads of clean headroom
+ Full-range equalisation
+ Smooth overdrive
+ Preamp/processor input
+ Decent mid-power pedal platform
+ Very portable

– Lacks sonic character
– Fixed power output
– No effects loop
– Basically a one-sound amp

A bargain price for a handwired valve amplifier that works as an effective pedal platform and provides valve power for processors and modellers

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Gavrosh 10

- **PRICE** £455, plus delivery
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel valve head with CD input, effects loop, headphone output and digital reverb, made in Russia
- **POWER RATING** 10W (2W switchable)
- **VALVES** 3x ECC83, 1x 12AT7, 2x EL84
- **CONTROL PANEL** Power, 2/10W, speaker switch, volume, treble, middle, bass, low/high gain, clean/lead, volume, input socket, footswitch jack, reverb, presence, headphone output, headphone volume, CD input, return & send sockets
- **REAR PANEL** 4- & 8-ohm speaker outputs
- **SPEAKER** N/A
- **DIMENSIONS** 375x223x235mm
- **WEIGHT** 7.4Kg/16.3lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Offers a wide range of usable tones
+ Full-range equalisation
+ Three distinct voicings
+ CD input
+ Headphone output
+ Switchable output power

– Treble can become a little harsh and shrill
– High gain sounds tend towards fizziness

A very versatile valve practice amp with practical features and a bit of a micro-Soldano vibe

7/10

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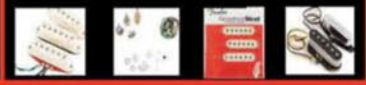

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Hudson Electronics Broadcast & Sidecar

Hudson Electronics hand builds pedals that are innovative and original in concept and design. **HUW PRICE** twists some Yorkshire hot pots...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

BROADCAST

Like the Broadcast, the **JHS Colour Box £309** is derived from classic console preamps – and in addition to stompbox duties, it can be used to record directly. The **Pettyjohn PreDrive £256** is an impedance-matching preamp with a transformer-coupled direct output.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SIDECAR

For classic tones, you could consider an **Ibanez TS808 Reissue £159**. For extra versatility and refinement, check out the **Voodoo Lab Sparkledrive MOD £119** and the **T-Rex Moller 2 £139**.

Hand building on stripboard using carefully selected components, Hudson Electronics has become one of the UK's most respected boutique pedal manufacturers. Many of the components used are new old stock, including germanium and silicon transistors; and the wiring, testing and final assembly are all done in-house.

The Broadcast and Sidecar are both DC supply only, so no batteries. They'll run on voltages ranging from nine to 24 volts, with higher voltages increasing headroom and reducing sag. They look fantastic, but the telling is in the tone.

Broadcast

For those of us who plied our trade in professional analogue audio, the RAF blue of the Broadcast's enclosure is as evocative as any tweed or tolex. It positively screams Neve – almost certainly the finest manufacturer of mixing consoles in history. Those original consoles sounded so good that plenty of guitarists and bassists would opt to record straight into the mixing desk. Hudson's Broadcast is a preamp based on Neve topology with NOS germanium transistors and a steel-core Triad transformer. Unlike some other desk-derived preamps, this one plugs into regular guitar amps.

In use

Starting at its cleanest setting with equalised on/off volume levels reveals the circuit's overdrive characteristics. Gain trim and level control the gain and output respectively, and a low-cut filter sets the amount of bass content.

The overdrive creeps in gently and it's very responsive to playing touch. The purpose of the low-cut control becomes apparent as the bottom end acquires girth

Part of the appeal of those old Neves was the way they enhanced sounds by creating a harmonically richer tone with an increased sense of scale and a slight softening of transient peaks.

No wonder, then, that Hudson figured these characteristics would be perfect as the basis for a clean boost pedal. It's gone further by adding a high-gain switch to push further into some of the preamp's colouration. There is some bass roll-off, but the upper frequencies have a delicate sheen that ramps up the jangle factor and aids definition.

Increasing the gain level adds harmonic overtones. It also fattens up the tone and restores the missing bass frequencies without losing that chiming clarity. The overdrive creeps in gently

and it's very responsive to playing touch. You'll notice a tad more compression, and the purpose of the low-cut control becomes apparent as the bottom end acquires girth.

Around halfway up, gain level induces a snarly and compressed overdrive with a wide-open treble that never gets harsh or shrill. Just like its illustrious inspirer, the Broadcast enhances the sound that's already there by making it clearer and more complex, rather than changing it into something else.

In high-gain mode, the Broadcast switches to square wave. At its most extreme, the overdrive veers into 60s fuzz territory, but without any of the craziness. Notes remain clearly defined and while the sustain is increased, it's not a Big Muff type of sound.

With a Les Paul I found myself playing Stooges riffs, and it's an amazing overdrive for power-pop and punk rhythm parts. At lower gain levels, the Broadcast delivers an unusually articulate overdrive tone.

With the bass rolled off, the upper-midrange character provides a Voxy jangle over arpeggios and it fills out into a more Marshall-like roar as you feed some bass back in. Hook this pedal up to any clean or slightly overdriven valve amp and you'll discover a seemingly inexhaustible supply of clean and dirty tones.

Sidecar

Back when 'transparent overdrive' was largely theoretical, the Tube Screamer came tantalisingly close. However, the muddy midrange hump and veiled treble caused frustration. Then came clones with more bass, extended top and clearer mids, but something was lost in the process.

Players who reconsider their position on Tube Screamers often rediscover their natural charms. In the right context, that midrange hump can work wonders, beefing up the clean tone of mid-scooped amps for powerchords and solos. If you need transparent overdrive, though, there are plenty of pedals better suited to the task.

In essence, the Sidecar is a Tube Screamer-inspired overdrive with drive and level controls. The input is buffered prior to the clipping stage, but the Sidecar is true bypass. A high-grade audio op-amp housed in a metal canister is preferred to the usual chip, and the clipping components include a germanium transistor, a diode and an LED. The modified tone circuit is a sophisticated take on a Baxandall-style tone stack derived from a Studer mixing console.

In use

The Sidecar is unusual because it captures all the great qualities of a Tube Screamer without the stock limitations. In fact, it doesn't seem to have much in the way of limitations at all. The gain ranges from clean to full-on fuzz with bluesy drive in between, and the two tone controls have just about everything covered.

The Sidecar captures all the qualities of a Tube Screamer without the stock limitations. It doesn't seem to have much in the way of limitations at all

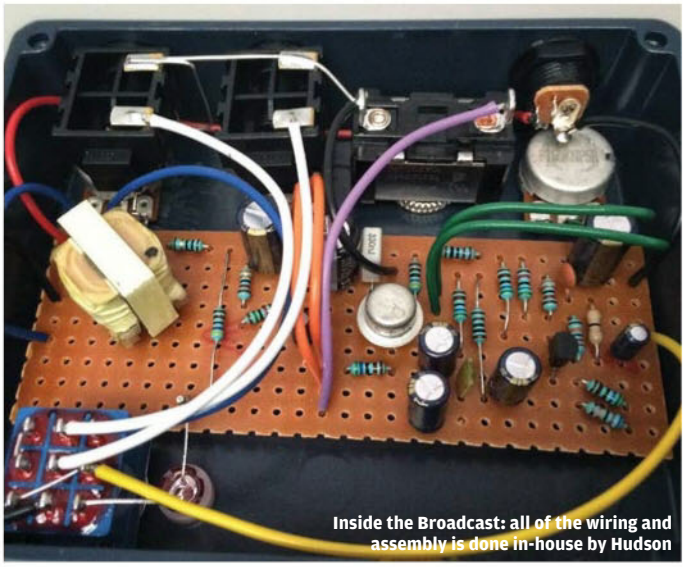
Although there's no mid control, that doesn't mean you can't control the mids. With the treble, bass and level around noon, the Sidecar has a more or less neutral response. Turn the tone controls down while increasing the level and the result is a midrange boost. Boosted treble and bass with increased level will bring you a midrange scoop.

Like the Broadcast, this pedal has a sweetly flattering effect on treble frequencies. Even when you start adding gain and treble, the Sidecar retains a refined top-end response that's both smooth and dynamic. You can play at high gain with a pick, or with your fingers for Eric Johnson or Jeff Beck-style tones.

For soloing, you can dial in as much sustain and gain as you'll ever need, but even at fairly high gain settings you can revert to chords and arpeggios and each note will sound clear and distinct.

Compared directly to a 1981 TS-9, the Sidecar sounds smoother and also better defined in both the highs and lows. It doesn't become spiky when you dig in hard, and the scope of the Baxandall stack enables you to dial in whatever tone you want, even with midrange-heavy guitars. As Tube Screamer-inspired pedals go, they don't come much better than the Sidecar.

In the course of reviewing countless pedals, we've seen soldering and layouts that range from shocking to tidy and even elegant, but these are the first pedals that have made *G&B* gasp in awe. It may sound geeky but we care about such things, and the way these Hudsons are made is beautiful to behold. This attention to detail pays dividends in usability, versatility and outright tone. The biggest surprise is just how affordable these top-class pedals are.



Inside the Broadcast: all of the wiring and assembly is done in-house by Hudson

KEY FEATURES

BROADCAST

- **PRICE** £155
- **DESCRIPTION** True bypass Neve-inspired boost/overdrive pedal running on 9-24v centre negative power supply, made in the UK
- **CONTROLS** Low cut, low/high-gain switch, gain trim, level
- **CONTACT** Hudson Electronics **info@hudsonelectronicsuk.com** **www.hudsonelectronicsuk.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Delivers clean boost with improved clarity
+ Very refined treble characteristic
+ Highly effective tone shaper and enhancer
+ Wide gain range

- No battery power

A versatile clean boost, overdrive and pseudo fuzz all in one box with beautifully refined sonic enhancement and great touch dynamics

10/10

KEY FEATURES

SIDECAR

- **PRICE** £155
- **DESCRIPTION** True bypass Tube Screamer-inspired boost/overdrive pedal with Baxandall tone stack running on 9V-24v centre negative power supply, made in the UK
- **CONTROLS** Drive, treble, bass, level

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Tube Screamer tone without the mush
+ Powerful equalisation
+ Wide range of tones
+ Massive gain range

- Only if you don't like Tube Screamer-style overdrive
- No battery power

Tube Screamer-like overdrive with enhanced clarity, more effective tone control and a much wider gain range

9/10

Fender Paramount PM-3 Standard & PM-2 Deluxe

The six-strong Paramount series of electro-acoustics sport features that evoke 1960s Fenders and a range of spec and finish options. **RICK BATEY** puts them to the test

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Paramount PM-2 Deluxe

There's a wealth of parlours out there these days. For less money, try the **Farida M-15E £399**, a solid/laminated mahogany picker with a Fishman Isys T. For a little more, look at the **Faith FMEHG-BNC £773**, a solid spruce and solid rosewood sweety with a Shadow Nanoflex

PM-3 Standard

You'll give up the solid back and sides, but the **Martin GPX1AE £559** is a big-name electro folkie with a big sound to match. Or consider the new **Seagull Maritime Concert Hall SWS SG £699** – an all-solid sitka and mahogany electro with a Godin Q1-T system

Paramount – it's a wonderfully proud-sounding name, and one that was used half a century ago by various manufacturers, including Harmony, Kay and Oscar Schmidt. Now Fender has resurrected it for its new, six-strong line-up of electro-acoustics. The Paramount series is refreshingly simple: it's essentially three models – the PM-1 dreadnought, the PM-2 parlour and the PM-3 000 – in Standard and Deluxe forms. Each comes with the same unique Fender/Fishman preamp.

These new guitars were designed in the USA, but are made in China, and the company has added a number of touches that hark back to assorted Fender guitars of the past: a stylised old-school headstock logo, pickguards that echo those of Fender flattops from the 60s and checkerboard binding of the kind you'd find on a Rossmeisl-designed Coronado semi-acoustic.

The Standard models have a natural-finish solid spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides and a rosewood fingerboard; the Deluxe models offer a choice of natural or sunburst tops, again with solid spruce, but solid East Indian rosewood back and sides, an ebony board and 'Concert Tone' abalone and MOP fingerboard inlays.

PM-2 Deluxe

Our PM-2 is the Deluxe version, and we like the parlour body shape – it seems as though Fender has taken a careful look at guitars of the 1930s, such as Slingerlands and Regals. It's a 12-fret model with a medium 24.75-inch scale and a wide 45mm/1.75-inch nut, and the neck is slightly chunky and deepens noticeably once you get past the eighth fret. Our example is well set up to a medium-low action, with narrow vintage frets and lots of space at the bridge for fingerpicking. It's got just the right amount of neck relief and, it's worth mentioning, a healthy neck-set giving about 4mm height at the saddle. Overall, it's a decent player.

We like the parlour body shape – it seems as though Fender has taken a careful look at guitars of the 30s

It looks fine, too. The 14-inch-wide body is gloss all over with a subtle and well-judged sunburst in a figure-eight pattern. As well as the checkerboard binding and soundhole rosette and the double-checkerboard back strip, we've got a traditional ebony belly-down bridge with a drop-in bone saddle, a single-ply tortie guard, a fully bound and purfled ebony fingerboard, a black-faced headstock and a set of smooth open-backed tuners with black plastic Waverly-shaped buttons: a cool touch. The gloss-finished neck is one piece of mahogany with a stacked heel, and it's got some unusual wide, shallow figuring

– not the super-straight grain some might like to see, perhaps, but it is still pretty.

There are two strap buttons – the one on the upper shoulder may seem alarmingly placed, but Fender has made sure it has a reinforcing block behind it. The preamp is unobtrusive, with three finger-wheels – bass and treble, with volume in the middle – protruding through the side, and an oval tuner window; you press one side to switch it on or off and the other side to engage phase reverse.

The electro sound is as we've come to expect from Fishman's undersaddle systems, and it has adaptable frequency bands that come into play when fine-tuning the bass or easing off a little on the treble. The tuner is adequate rather than impressive: if you want pin-point accuracy, you might be better off with a clip-on unit with a strobe function, but we like the way the whole window changes colour from blue to green when the needle hits the spot.

The PM-3 has good depth, width and oomph. It's a likeable sound that will cope with almost any playing style

Acoustically, the PM-2 is quite loud – a degree louder than most of the L-00/parlour-type imports we've tried of late. The quartersawn scalloped X bracing must be doing its job, and the top seems fairly thin. The bottom E is tonally a little shallow, but there's an agreeably quick response from the midrange. Snappy and bright, with a dollop of pre-war budget-guitar honkness, it's very much a blues picker's guitar, with a boxy honk and an almost resonator-like nasality that'll reward a heavy thumb-picked alternating bass rather than strummed song accompaniment – but it'll cope with that, at a pinch.

PM-3 Standard

The PM-3 is the 000 in the Paramount series, and the only model with a cutaway. This one is a Standard model, which means back and sides of nice-quality solid mahogany. The finish is a quality gloss, but the natural livery gives us a better chance to check out the quality of the solid spruce top, and it's good – fairly straight with a consistent medium grain. It's backed by the same scalloped X bracing as the PM-3 and the inside is super-tidy, with mahogany strips reinforcing the sides. The Standard models keep all the Deluxe body, neck and fingerboard binding and the checkerboard purfling, plus the pearl Fender logo and the ornate headstock inlay; but the lavish fingerboard markers are replaced by simple small pearl dots.

At less than 4lbs, it weighs even less than the smaller parlour, which is a very promising sign, and although it's a standard 15 inches wide at the lower bout it's a quarter of an inch slimmer than a Martin 000 at the tailblock. The C-shaped neck is supposed to have the same 44.5mm nut as the PM-2, but it measures a touch less. It's slightly shallower, too, making for an easier grip, and it shares its long 643mm scale length with the PM-1 dreadnought and its 15-inch fingerboard radius with the whole of the series. Though the action at the nut could come down a shade, it plays well all over the neck with no buzzes.

The Fender/Fishman preamp is the same as before, as is the side-mounted output jack/battery drawer unit, which leaves the strap button free to perform dangle duties; but in terms of acoustic tone, the PM-3 has larger dimensions on its side.

Although there's still a fresh-out-of-the-box edge to the sound, the PM-3 has good depth, width and oomph. It's a likeable sound that will cope with almost any playing style. It's clear and open with a firm, well-balanced bass, good volume, projection and sustain, and a rounded thump to the midrange in the lower positions that rewards single-note plectrum lines as well as gentle fingerpicking. The sound reflects the price, and the use of all-solid woods means it'll get better as time passes.

Fender has thrown a lot of thought into the Paramount series, and it shows. These guitars are lightweight, and built and finished nicely, with details that are attractive and distinctive; the pickup might not offer anything groundbreaking, but the preamp's ergonomics are excellent. The PM-2 is a fine-looking specimen, but the bigger-sounding PM-3 is the one we'd choose to take home.

KEY FEATURES

Paramount PM-2 Deluxe

- **PRICE** £629
- **DESCRIPTION** 12-fret parlour-size electro-acoustic, made in China
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top with solid East Indian rosewood back and sides, cream binding with checkerboard inlay, mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard, open tuners, ornate MOP fingerboard inlays, bone nut and saddle, Fender/Fishman PM pickup system, twin strap buttons
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Sunburst top, gloss all over
- **OPTIONS** Standard model: natural finish, solid mahogany back and sides, £519
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 25mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.9kg/4.18lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ 30s-meets-60s style
+ Solid woods throughout
+ Impressive spec for the money
+ Well built and finished

- Sounds a bit one-dimensional
- Neck might be too chunky for some players' tastes

Small-body success is a hard thing to pull off, but Fender's use of solid woods helps, and it's a charismatic-looking little character

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Paramount PM-3 Standard

- **PRICE** £519
- **DESCRIPTION** 000-sized cutaway electro-acoustic, made in China
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top with solid mahogany back and sides, cream binding with checkerboard inlay, mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard, open tuners, bone nut and saddle, Fender/Fishman PM pickup system, twin strap buttons
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Gloss all over
- **OPTIONS** Deluxe model: sunburst finish, solid rosewood back and sides, £629
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at seventh fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.5mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.77kg/3.9lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Quality sound
+ All-solid woods
+ Very lightweight
+ Slim, comfy neck
+ Ready for the stage

- Deluxe option could sound richer

If Fender isn't the first name to spring to your mind when it comes to acoustics, the PM-3 might come as a surprise. It's a tasty-looking, well made, good-sounding guitar

9/10

Italia Maranello Z

Trev Wilkinson's eye-catching Italia basses have found favour with the likes of Manic Street Preachers' Nicky Wire. **GARETH MORGAN** puts the Maranello Z to the test

KEY FEATURES

Italia Maranello Z

- **PRICE** £729 (including gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollowbody bass, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany body with maple top, bolt-on maple neck with 22 medium jumbo nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard; Italia die-cast tuners, rosewood piezo bridge; chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Active with piezo transducers in the bridge saddles, quick-release nine-volt battery compartment on the back
- **CONTROLS** Volume, bass and treble
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Black, Cream
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 12mm at nut, 16.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.56kg (7.85lbs)
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes Ltd 01132 865381 **www.jhs.co.uk**

Regular *Guitar & Bass* readers will be familiar with the visual feasts that are Trev Wilkinson's Italia Guitars. Though the Maranello Z bass has been part of the Italia range for a number of years, it was only added to the catalogue of UK distributor John Hornby Skewes relatively recently, in late 2014. The model came into being when Manic Street Preachers bassist Nicky Wire – often seen touting a single-cutaway sparkly red Maranello – needed something with a different vibe for acoustic gigs.

Still in familiar single-cutaway form, the Korean-made Maranello Z differs from its sister model in construction and pickups. What you get is a semi-hollow body, sporting a cream-finished maple top with black plastic binding. A pair of cool f-holes indicate that the mahogany core has chambers in the upper-rear and lower-front bouts. It's often the case that acoustic tonal benefits from chambered construction are offset by fitting standard magnetic pickups, but not here. Italia has chosen a much more interesting option by equipping the Z with a piezo-loaded rosewood bridge (with chrome tailpiece), the transducers being tiny chrome saddles that guide the strings towards the neck. The volume, bass and treble controls are housed on an elliptical black plastic plate on the lower bout, and there's a quick-release battery compartment on the back, which means the Z is active, Jim, but not as we know it…

The bolt-on maple neck has a shallow C profile, making the Z really comfortable to play. It's neatened by black binding, bears 22 medium frets and split pearloid mini block position markers. It culminates in a similarly black-bound, distorted oblong headstock bearing four Italia die-cast tuners and a funky retro maker's badge.

There's a real acoustic vibe here, and it contributes to a midrange that's solid, offering snappy punch with intent

Sounds

When you fire up the Z with the tone controls set flat, whilst not the widest, the lows snarl and the E string has an aggressive element. There's a real acoustic vibe here that contributes to a solid midrange, offering snappy punch with plenty of intent. For the highs, we're talking subtle fizz, so not quite as explosive as we'd like, and the G string is a tad wiry, but the response is even with ample cut. If it proves too lively, you can roll off the treble and boost the bass to dismiss excessive rasp, resulting in a decent thud, softened note edges and increased versatility. Boosting the treble alone gets you a spikey sound that can be overly metallic, but max the bass dial and it's big and grinding with bags of presence, making the Z loads of fun to play.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE…

The **Traveler Guitar Ultra-Light Bass £387** is a through-neck semi-hollowbody, weighing just over 1.5kg and boasting a Shadow piezo pickup and EQ. For a slight variation, the **Epiphone Jack Casady Signature £899** is a twin-cutaway, semi-hollowbody option with a bigger body and a rich tone. If it must be strictly an acoustic, the **Washburn AB10 £449** plays beautifully, sounds great and is still one of the most popular acoustic basses on the market.

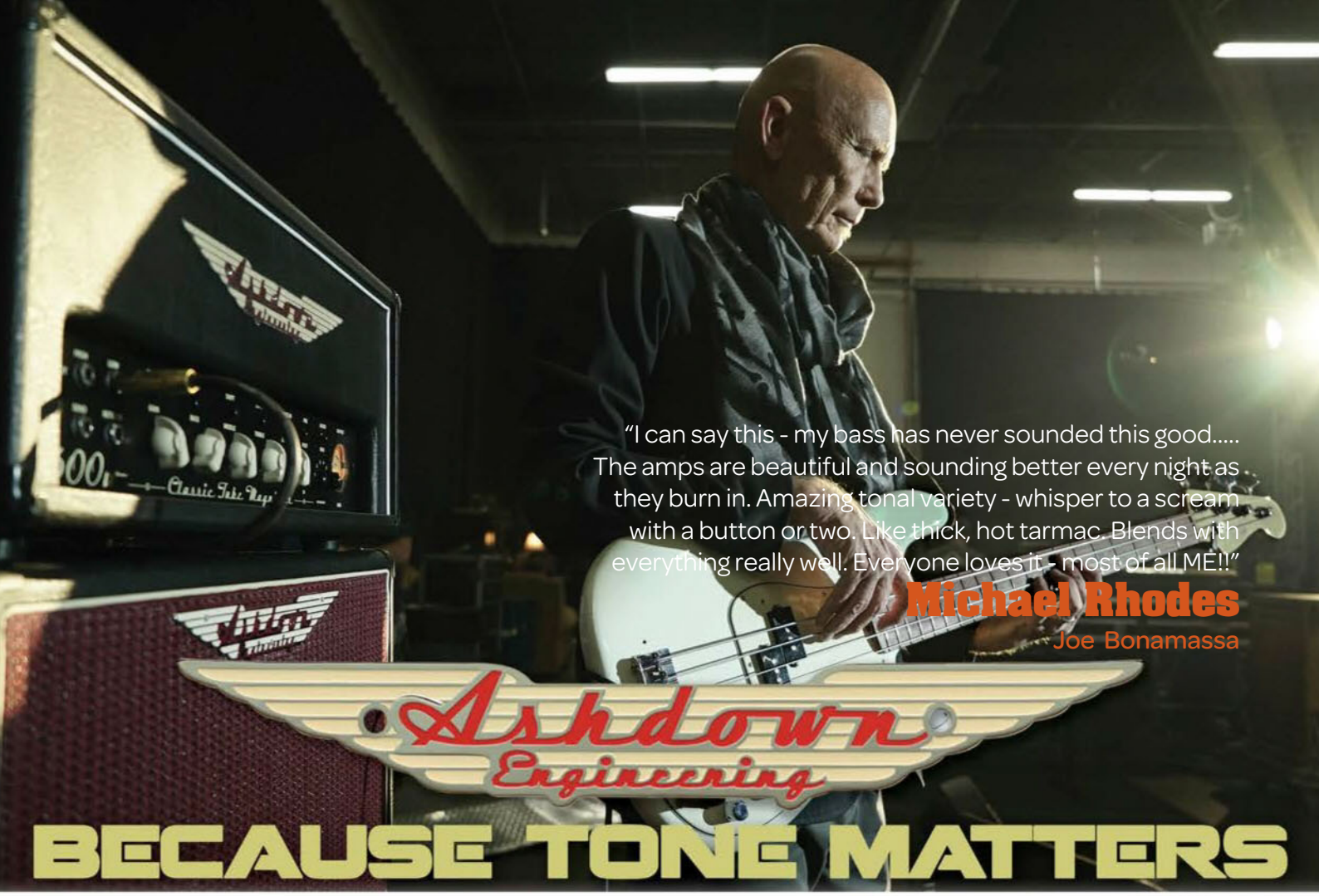
Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Well built, with the appealing quirkiness we've come to expect
+ Up-front, in-yer-face and authoritative
+ More versatile than its acoustic nature might suggest

- Could do with a little more thud, and some may find the tonal variation too limited
- It may be excessively spikey for some, although groundwound strings may be the answer

The Maranello Z is a rock 'n' roll bass with an intriguing tonal twist and bags of style. It's not a pure acoustic, but that's not a bad thing

8/10



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JJ TESLA TRADE OFFER

JJ Tesla valves have a worldwide reptation for excellent sound quality. These valves are one of our most popular ranges for our trade and service customers. Our full trade and quantity details on JJ and other popular valve brands are on our website with quantity prices starting as low as 10 pieces per type. Here are some examples of our JJ quantity prices.

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ECC82	10 Pcs	£7.80 Each	E34L	16 Pcs	£12.72 Each
ECC83-S	10 Pcs	£7.20 Each	EL84	16 Pcs	£7.80 Each
ECC83-S	20 Pcs	£6.60 Each	6L6GC	16 Pcs	£12.72 Each
ECC83-S	40 Pcs	£6.00 Each	6V6GTS	16 Pcs	£11.40 Each
ECC83-MG	10 Pcs	£9.60 Each	5881	16 Pcs	£12.60 Each
ECC83-MG	20 Pcs	£9.00 Each	6550	12 Pcs	£21.60 Each
5751	10 Pcs	£9.00 Each	KT88	12 Pcs	£22.80 Each

HARMA RETRO -CRYO SUPERIOR GRADE

The Harma Retro Cryo range recreates the classic sounds and designs of the most famous new old stock valves for a new generation of musician. So if you want an EL34 to crunch like an old Mullard or a 6L6GC to sing like a Sylvania. Then the Harma Cryo Retro range is the one for you.
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ECC83-Retro Cryo	£21.60	KT66- Retro Cryo	£48.00
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EL84-Retro Cryo	£24.00	6550A-Retro Cryo	£34.56
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ECC83-5751	£36.00	5Y3WGTA	£24.00	6X4WA	£14.40
ECC83-12AX7	£54.00	6C4WA	£9.60	7199	£36.00
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ECC81-STR	£14.40	EL84/E84L burst tested	£21.60
ECC83-STR	£14.40	EL84 Retro	£18.00
ECC83-7025-STR	£14.40	5881-Mil Spec	£19.20
EL34 STR	£19.20	6L6GC STR	£21.60
EL34 Retro	£21.60	6L6GC-Retro	£21.60
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ECC83-S	£16.80	£20.70	6L6GC-S	£24.00	£26.40
EL34-M	£19.20	£21.60	6V6GT-R	£19.20	£21.60
EL84-S	£14.40	£16.80	6V6GT-S	£24.00	£26.40

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Hawk Picks

Handmade picks that conserve wildlife while improving your tone and technique

PRICE FROM £12 each **CONTACT** www.hawkpicks.co.uk

Hawk Picks is a UK company that produces a range of handmade and hand-finished picks intended to mimic the look, tone and feel of genuine Hawksbill turtleshell. Amongst the available options are a right or left bevel to the relevant leading edge, said to improve accuracy and speed, and a satin ivory finish for better grip.

As the material is adept at absorbing and retaining moisture from the surrounding environment, Hawk warns against submerging the pick in liquid. It also advises caution when keeping the pick in your pocket due to damage that may be caused to the pick edges, and although these rules may seem impractical on the face of it, we're more than happy to follow the guidelines. You won't find Hawk picks in Poundland, after all.

In use

To begin our sound tests, we reached for the first pick we could lay our hands on in order to compare it to the Hawks. This happened to be a Dunlop Hetfield Black Fang, a 1.14-gauge Ultex pick with a compact point, and we put that up against both the 1.2mm medium-gauge TB1 with the standard bevel and the more rounded TB3 with the right bevel. We're not embarrassed to admit we approached our first strum with a certain amount of scepticism, but when used with our solid-topped Takamine acoustic, the tone from the Hawk was discernibly warmer and richer.

Switching to an electric guitar, our right-hand technique was undeniably improved when using picks with a right bevel. Hawk doesn't pretend its products are a short cut to lightning-fast picking but, if you already have the chops, you'll notice an immediate improvement in picking velocity. The bevel and low-friction material enables the pick to glide across the strings, and we particularly enjoyed using the 1.6mm-gauge TB4, a small yet perfectly formed plec not too far removed in vibe and intended application from the lauded Jazz III.

You'll need to try as many Hawks as you can, as the choice of pick is a personal one but, having used eight of the range – including the signature tri-tip pick of mandolinist Simon Brady – we're convinced of their merits. Whether you want to drop £12 on a single plectrum is up to you, but the advantages they offer, to both your tone and technique, are undeniable. **SB**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

A range of hand-made picks with custom bevels, that offer tangible improvements to tone and technique. They're not cheap, but are certainly worth seeking out. These Hawks are slayers!

8/10

TC Electronic Ditto X4 Looper

A floor-based, dual-track looper with effects, that prides itself on its simplicity

PRICE £189 **CONTACT** www.tcelectronic.com

There is an extensive choice of loopers on the market these days, and some are significantly more complex than others. Not everyone requires an Ed Sheeran-style guitar orchestra, and it's a fact that some looping workstations can cause you to spend more time thumbing through the manual than making music.

We can't envisage any such issues with the new X4, the sixth member of TC Electronic's Ditto looping dynasty. Its older brother, the Ditto, is simplicity itself, incorporating just one knob; and on the face of it the X4 comprises a pair of those same units in a single chassis. However, there's a little more to it than that.

The two independent loop tracks, each providing five minutes of recording time, are assigned their own level knob plus an unlatching micro toggle that allows you to store the loop you've recorded for use elsewhere. You can also utilise either Serial mode, allowing you to switch seamlessly between the two tracks, or Sync mode, which lets you play both at the same time: this wouldn't be possible with a pair of Dittos. A master decay control regulates the fade duration of older loops as new ones are recorded, and a seven-way rotary pot accesses a selection of loop effects that can be turned on and off via footswitch.

There are also stereo in and outputs, MIDI In and Thru ports, and a USB Mini B socket, plus four DIP switches that allow you to tailor a selection of the X4's functions to your own tastes. Connect to a computer via USB to either export saved loops to your desktop or, equally intriguingly, import audio files into the pedal via an unfussy drag and drop interface. Although it took a few tries for the X4 to cooperate with our MacBook Pro, we wielded third-party rhythm tracks and sound effects with aplomb.

In use

We placed the X4 at the end of our effects chain, although running loops through a vintage fuzz or echo pedal has its own undeniable charm, and we were up and looping in minutes. Constructing soundscapes and building parts was simple, and the loop effects certainly added a great deal to the mix. Highlights here include the established Reverse and Half Speed options, plus the marvellous Tape Stop that mimics an old tape player grinding to a halt, taking your loop with it. Very effective indeed. **SB**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

The Ditto X4 is well priced and a doddle to use, and if you're new to looping this would be a good place to start. With a simple interface and all the features you'll realistically need from a looper, not to mention TC's customary attention to sonic detail, you really need to try one.

9/10

Six of the best

While the sound of a 100-watt valve amp at full tilt is a uniquely thrilling experience, it's rarely practical. Meet six great, low-power valve combos

Fender Blues Junior III

PRICE £490 **CONTACT** www.fender.com

This 15-watt classic is arguably the most popular low-power valve combo in the world and for good reason. Delivering the goods at low volumes thanks to a pair of EL84 output tubes and a 12AX7 preamp, the Blues Junior has found uses in pretty much all genres of music and is also a decent pedal platform too. This latest incarnation brings upgrades in the form of a black control panel that Fender says is easier to read than the previous silver version, vintage Fender dog bone handle, shock absorbers for the EL84s and a Fender Special Design Eminence 'lightning bolt' 12-inch speaker. A must-try.

Marshall 1974x Handwired 18W

PRICE £1,649 **CONTACT** www.marshallamps.com

This handwired version of the original 1974 model packs classic late-60s overdriven Marshall sounds into a portable 18-watt package. Think mini-Bluesbreaker and you'll be in the right ballpark – it's the sound of sixties Clapton in a portable package. It features two EL84s in the power amp, three ECC83s in the preamp, an EZ81 rectifier tube and a valve-driven tremolo that may, however, prove a little 'marmite'. Speaker duties are handled by a reissue of the original amp's 20-watt ceramic magnet Celestion T1221.

The Artist 15 produces sparkling cleans and impressive medium-gain overdrive, and is a portable option at a very attractive price

Blackstar Artist 15

PRICE £649 **CONTACT** www.blackstaramps.com

Blackstar's Artist 15 and its big brother the Artist 30 are intended by the British manufacturer as 'affordable boutique' relatives of the handwired Artisan series. This means they're PCB-based and powered by 6L6 output valves rather than EL84s – and in the case of the 15-watt version, fitted with a single 12-inch Celestion V-type speaker, resulting in Fender-like thump. The Artist 15 is a well-built, robust combo with two distinctly voiced channels. It takes pedals well, produces sparkling cleans and impressive medium-gain overdrive and is a portable, lightweight option at a very attractive price.

Swart Atomic Space Tone

PRICE £1,599 **CONTACT** www.coda-music.com

It's a slightly left-of-centre choice but our editor can testify that this wondrous little combo from North Carolina not only sounds utterly delicious (and brilliantly raunchy when cranked) but it can out-gun even the most bombastic drummer with a suitably efficient driver installed. Beautifully handwired internals, hypnotic tremolo, cavernous reverb and a lightweight pine cab make this a ludicrously portable tone machine for gigs.

Laney VC15-110

PRICE £359 **CONTACT** www.laney.co.uk

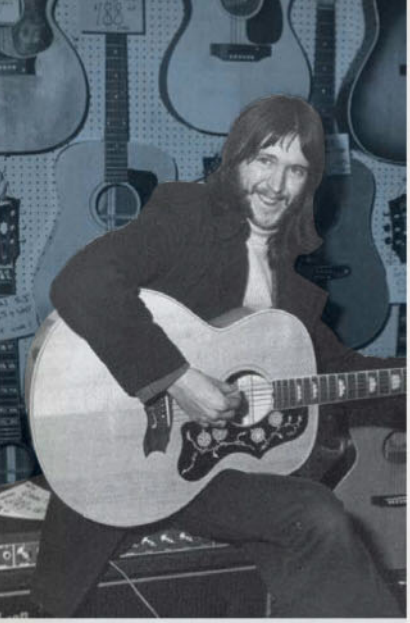
The VC-15 is Laney's answer to the AC15 (below), and although the Vox influence here is closer to The Beatles than Bryan May, the Laney's lovely tube tone that can be pushed into more contemporary high-gain territory. The vintage look is aided by handsome mini chickenhead knobs and white piping around the black and grey speaker grille, while three-band EQ, clean and drive modes and in-built reverb add to the range of tones on offer. Weighing in at just over 11kg with a single 10-inch speaker onboard, it'll fit nicely on your singer's lap in the front seat of the car on the way to gigs, too.

The Vox sound has been one of the central pillars of rock 'n' roll, reaching iconic status during the British beat group era

Vox AC15 C1X

PRICE £695 **CONTACT** www.voxamps.com

Vox's AC30 and AC15 need little introduction and the Vox sound has been one of the central pillars in the development of rock 'n' roll music, reaching iconic status during the British Beat Boom era. For those seeking authentic 60s sonics, the optional Celestion Alnico Blue speaker provides a huge upgrade on the G12M Greenback when it comes to chime and harmonic complexity. The Blue will make sure you punch through the mix at band practice and gigs, too. If you haven't yet experienced the unique jangle and top-end sizzle of a Vox AC15, what are you waiting for?



MORE GIG MATTERS

Delving once again into his collection of gig memories, **SID BISHOP** recalls on-stage fires, encounters with biker gangs and a Trafalgar Square show in front of 30,000 people...

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

Back in the November issue of *G&B*, I wrote a piece recalling gigs I had performed in past years, and how so many of them had turned into nightmares. I was gratified to note your response to my experiences – it prompted a significant mailbag and, as I expected, I'm far from the only one who has endured such bad nights. One dear old pal of mine, with whom I played in the 60s and 70s, phoned me after reading the article to say he was amazed we'd survived.

I was reminded of a gig we did for the Students' Union at the University of East Anglia. Some bright spark had decided to decorate the stage with long hanging strips of multi-coloured plastic. It looked good, but the lack of forethought soon made itself evident. In those days, I was not averse to buying a cheap guitar and wrecking it on stage – always guaranteed to provoke a reaction from the audience. On this occasion, my chosen sacrifice was a Watkins Rapier, bought from Selmers earlier that day. At the climax of our performance, I set the Rapier on fire using lighter fluid, a la Hendrix, then whirled the flaming instrument around my head prior to its final destruction. Unfortunately, gobbets of molten burning plastic flew off, igniting the hanging strips, which flared up instantly. Quick reactions from the stage crew averted what could have been a serious incident. At least it would have got us in the papers!

The gigs weren't all bad, and by far the overwhelming majority were exciting and rewarding experiences that live with me to this day – like, for example, one particular night we played at The Cricketers in Southend, and we succeeded in getting the audience so fired up that the local bikers were prompted to ride a motorcycle along the full length of the bar, our vocalist riding pillion! We also had memorable nights at The Greyhound on Fulham Palace Road and the original Marquee Club in Wardour Street, and our Trafalgar Square performance to somewhere around 30,000 people was really something to relate to the grandchildren.

In that same piece, I also made reference to several venues where booking a band of the type I was in would be completely inappropriate. In our defence, we were not directly responsible for getting these gigs, our booking agent was, and he was concerned only with making money – for us, naturally, and for himself too – often without fully thinking it through. This whole issue is convoluted, and I won't go down that road here – though I plan to in my next column.

> *"The local bikers were prompted to ride a motorcycle along the length of the bar with our vocalist riding pillion"*

Social media platforms such as Facebook have changed the game, and that may strike people of an older generation as being a bit of a lazy short-cut, but of course it's a legitimate and highly effective method of gaining exposure, and plenty of old-timers are getting in on the act, too – have you seen The Rolling Stones' Facebook page?!

I'm confident my comments will prompt some debate, but in my view there's no substitute for honing your skills by doing gigs in front of real audiences, good or bad, with all the ups and downs that inevitably result.

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VOX

Vintage BENCH TEST

1965 GIBSON ES-335

With more than 50 years on the clock, this classic semi-acoustic is still in near-mint condition. **HUW PRICE** makes a close inspection...

It's never been entirely clear if 'iced tea' and 'honeyburst' were actually official finish options that Gibson offered during the 1960s, or whether they are simply amongst a number of terms dreamed up by collectors and dealers to describe the various ways in which sunburst finishes have faded.

This ES-335's finish corresponds with what I understand to be a honeyburst, and I'm pretty certain it looks much the same today as it did when it was new. Because the back looks identical to the front, I can report with some confidence that this ES-335 has barely faded at all, and it's in near-mint condition.

Almost everything seems present and entirely correct. The only changed part, as far as I can tell, is the nut, but the bone replacement has been done properly and the factory nylon nut can be found inside the original case.

As a 1965 example, this ES-335 just squeezed in under the wire to get nickel hardware and a fingerboard that's almost certainly Brazilian rosewood. The pickups carry patent number stickers, and an attractive patina has developed on the covers.

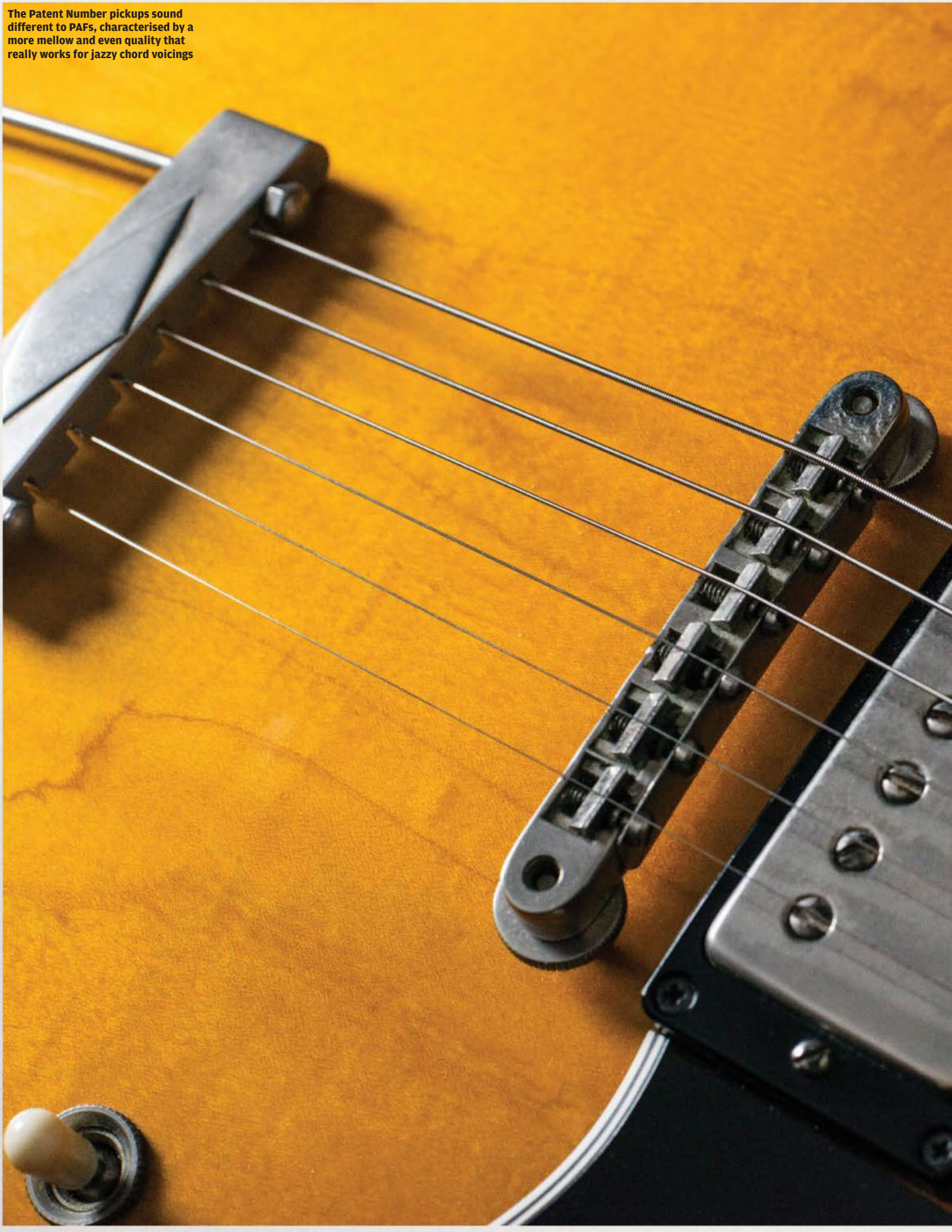
This ES-335 is almost perfectly preserved, it's unlikely you'll find a cleaner example from this year

Playwear is minimal, with just a small area of corrosion on the bass side of the bridge. It's the correct ABR-1 with a retaining wire and metal saddles. Personally, I think ES series guitars sound nicer with nylon saddles, and it's a cheap, easy and reversible modification to perform. The back of the neck retains all its lacquer, and the binding nibs are still there to be seen, along with original frets that appear to have plenty of life left in them.

KEY FEATURES

1965 GIBSON ES-335

- **SCALE LENGTH** 626mm/24 5/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.5mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.7kg
- **FINISH** Iced tea sunburst/ honeybust gloss
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 029 2039 8215 **www.cranes.co.uk**

There is a little wear on one side, but the bridge is the period-correct ABR-1 with a retaining wire and metal saddles

The Patent Number pickups sound different to PAFs, characterised by a more mellow and even quality that really works for jazzy chord voicings

Above left **This ES-335 has a trapeze tailpiece, which some players believe reduces sustain and makes string bending harder due to the extra string length**
Above right **The back is unblemished except for a tiny area of buckle rash**

The back is unblemished, save for a small area of buckle rash that's no more than 10mm in diameter. There are some tiny chips in the finish on the front, but you have to look closely to spot them. An attempt has been made to drop fill one with lacquer, which might have worked out better if the person responsible had used the correct colour. It's also worth noting that finish checking is minimal on this guitar.

It's good to see the original multi-ply pickguard hasn't gone AWOL. Some old Gibson pickguards curl up dramatically, and can even obstruct access to the treble E string, but this one has curled only very slightly around the neck pickup surround.

I will always test an electric guitar acoustically before I run it through an amp, and many solidbodies are a lot of fun to play that way. You might reasonably expect semi-solids, such as the ES-335 and its close cousins, to sound even better unplugged than solidbodies. In reality, the experience can sometimes be pretty uninspiring. Many ES-335s have a plunky, banjo-like quality, with very little natural sustain and a muffled wound-string response that makes them sound worn out, even when they're brand new. Oddly enough, the electric tone can often sound fabulous even when the acoustic sound isn't. So where does this 50-year-old beauty reside on the resonance spectrum?

Although the pickups sound different to PAFs, their tone might well be better suited to certain playing styles

The tone is very full and very mellow, but there's plenty of sustain and even the low strings sound fairly crisp. There is some degree of treble roll-off, but the tone is smooth and even across the strings. Although fine acoustic tone is not always a signifier of quality plugged-in tone, it is nevertheless a good start.

Like PAFs, these Patent Number humbuckers are extremely sensitive to height adjustment, and proximity to strings can dramatically alter the tone and character of a guitar. When I got hold of the ES-335, its pickups were set relatively close to the strings, and the result was a quite gutsy, thick tone. At the same time, it was very smooth and somewhat compressed with a soft treble response that worked really well with amp overdrive and pedals alike. Dropping the pickup height opened out the sound

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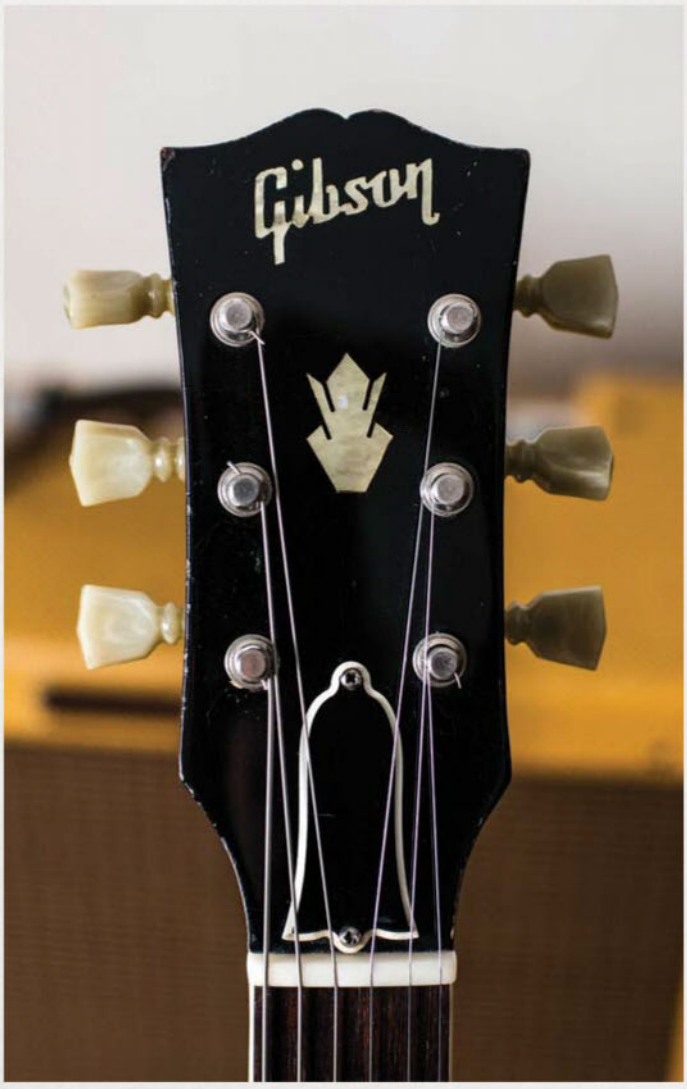

Above left **The nut has been changed but the bone replacement has been done well and the factory nylon nut can be found inside the original case**
Right **The back of the neck still retains all its original lacquer**

a little more, and really brought the in-between setting to life. This is where setting the pickup height makes all the difference, and can veer the tone from a nondescript amalgam of two pickups into something distinctly different. This ES-335 acquired an extra degree of woody honk that proved quite inspiring for clean and funky rhythm playing and bluesy licks.

Having a '57 Goldtop Les Paul on hand for comparison revealed how very different PAF and Patent Number Gibson humbuckers can sound. The PAFs are far more touch sensitive, they're brighter and there's a layer of upper-harmonic complexity that seems to be uniquely theirs.

In contrast, the Patent Numbers are more forgiving in some ways, and they have a mellow and even quality that really works for jazzy chord voicings and smooth soloing. The midrange is also thicker and more up-front.

Another big plus mark for this ES-335 is the neck dimensions. Some mid-60s Gibson necks feel slim and narrow, and depending on your preferences, they can seem a bit cramped. While it's no '58 or '59, this neck has a really comfortable medium depth. The regular string spacing at the nut also helps to make this a very easy-playing vintage guitar.

On closer inspection, the frets are serviceable, but fairly low and very flat on top. If you use a lot of string bending and vibrato, a full fret job may make this an even better player, although you may devalue the guitar in the process.

A comfortable neck and regular string spacing at the nut make this a very easy-playing vintage guitar

The trapeze tailpiece is another thing to consider because some players think it has less sustain and makes string bending harder due to the extra string length. Bear in mind that many late-60s ES-335 players, Larry Carlton included, have installed stop tailpieces on their guitars. On the other hand, the trapeze does allow them to resonate in a different way, that results in a mellower and jazzier tone.

There are no playability issues, tuning is stable and everything works as it should. Although the pickups sound quite different to PAFs, their smoother and softer response and direct tone might well be better suited to certain playing styles. This fine-looking ES-335 is almost perfectly preserved, and it's unlikely you'll find a cleaner example from this year.

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

THE COLOUR AND THE SHAPE

Judith Davoli's vibrant collection of boldly designed guitars and lesser-appreciated brands is truly something to behold, as **Lars Mullen** discovers

"It's true that female guitar collectors are few and far between," says Judith Davoli. "I've been reading *Guitar & Bass* and the guitar collection articles for years and years, and I have to laugh when it often comes down to the guys saying they have to buy shoes and handbags to keep their wives happy as the guitars increase in numbers.

"I was out shopping for a pair of shoes and a handbag in Luton, Bedfordshire some time ago, but I didn't get past Coda Music. I was in there most of the day and came home with a Burns Bandit – how ironic," she laughs.

"It dates from '83, and I believe the last year of its run as a product of Jim Burn Actualizers Ltd, another of the many companies associated with the Burns name. The Bandit is becoming increasingly rare now. I love the six push-button selector switches and the mean green dark finish, which is a far cry from the luminous colours of my Switch guitars. The orange one is a Wild-1 and the yellow is an Oscar-IV, both are one-piece designs made from Vibracell. They sound pretty good, they're really comfortable to play and instantly brighten up a room.

"It's visual over playability every time. I'll consider a really cool colourful guitar even if it plays really badly"

"It's visual over playability every time. I'll consider a really cool colourful guitar even if it plays really badly, as most guitars can be set up to play to the player's personal taste, so it's colours all the way for me – along with alternative arty body designs.

"My hankering for the unusually weird and wonderful harkens back to a visit to London's Denmark Street in 1979. I really can't remember the shop, but they had a prototype Burns Black Scorpion guitar, which looked really unique, fitted out with brass hardware. This, along with the distinctive body design, really appealed to me – my affection for Burns guitars has been with me for a long time now. I have a Burns Flyte from '76 built during the company's Burns UK period to celebrate the [first commercial] flight of Concorde. This is such an eye-catcher with the Mach One Humbuster pickups, the finish is seriously fading now from off-white to cream. These were great poser guitars, as used by the likes of Marc Bolan and Slade's Dave Hill."

Bright-coloured plexiglass guitars are a big part of Davoli's collection: "Plexiglass guitars have always had a visual impact on me, I have six at >

Above **Judith with her 1973 Japanese Univox guitar organ**
Opposite page, top left **Shepherd inlay on Marlin DC-R**
Centre, top **PIY Thunderbolt (left), Marlin Wizard**
Centre, bottom **Silvertone Paul Stanley Apocalypse Special (left), Silvertone Signature Sovereign**
Top right **Headstock of Aria Legend**
Bottom left **Clear Shaftesbury (left) and Wesley guitars**
Bottom right **Schecter Devil (left), purple metallic Switch Innovo-III**

Legend

the moment, which I leave out near the window so the sun shines through the coloured bodies. I have a see-through blue Aria Legend, an LP-style Wesley in ink blue, two Wesley S-types in pink and yellow glass, a clear Wesley LP-type, and a clear Shaftesbury, based on the legendary Dan Armstrong model. All these are a gravitational challenge, as they weigh up to 18lbs, but the trade-off is the superb sustain. I'll often tune these to an open chord and play with a glass slide.

"Whilst brands like Hohner made some of the more affordable instruments, they also seemed to deliver some cool guitars that sound and play really well and appeal once again to my eye. I have a neat offset-bodied Hohner electric 12-string from '96, which seems to be quite rare, I've never seen another. As we know, lipstick pickups have a distinct jangle, so they are ideal for that 12-stringer. It can do it all – surf, pop and rockabilly – and sounds great through my 8-watt Park practice amp, which I bought just because it was finished in bright orange, but it's ideal.

"I can also relate to Eko when it comes down to affordability and style; the Ghost is their version of the classic Vox Phantom, loaded with three Hot Rails-style pickups and their own vibrato design.

"My '64 Vox Teardrop sounds wonderful through my Fender Champ; the single-coil pickups on this actual model I feel would give most Fenders a run for their money. For me, this is very Brian Jones and straight out of the 60s, with the customised blue 'wave' paint finish.

"When it comes to eye candy, though, I think the '73 Japanese Univox guitar organ takes some beating. The actual 'guitar-organ' creation was by MusiConics International Incorporated, who took the guitar and fitted their own electronic designs within. There is a lead that comes from the headstock with a plectrum on the end which, when it touches the strings, completes the electronic circuit that produces the sound. Each fret is divided into six segments, which all have an individual wire in the neck, so that's 132 wires for the full 22 frets, hence there's a forest of wires inside the neck, which join layered circuit boards in the body.

"My hat goes off to the person who designed this and to anyone who has the job of fault-finding on the Univox. For years, this one has been used as a regular guitar, although string bending is not that easy. I'm missing some parts, I'd love to hear from anyone out there using one that's complete or even has one of these unusual collectable guitars – let me know.

"If I want to rock out in songwriting mode, I'll usually reach for my Schecter Devil"

"A lot of the songs I've written have been inspired by the guitar I'm drawn to at the time, – the Spear TC Bronze model is responsible for several of my songs. It's more akin to a metal player's guitar, with the sculptured body patterns offset with black hardware. But whilst the Spear-branded humbuckers really push the front end of my amps, I've penned a few mellow, laid-back songs on this guitar. The logo on the headstock says 'Play With Inspiration', so I guess that says it all.

"If I want to rock out in songwriting mode, I'll usually reach for my Schecter Devil, which I personally call Black Gothic. Fitted with a pair of active Duncan Designed HB-105 humbuckers and a double octave neck, this one can really dig in – I love the devil headstock as well.

"I think that most of the angular-shaped body guitars I have not only look better in the playing position, they also sit better hanging on the >

Opposite page, top left **Aria Legend (left), Ink Blue Wesley**
Top right **Spear TC Bronze (left),**
Bottom left **Wesley Warlock-style**
Centre, top **Gretsch Traveling Wilburys (left), Indie Guitars Union Black**
Centre, bottom **Fernandes Silver Glitter (left), 1996 Hohner 12-string**
Bottom right **Landola 12-string**
This page, above left **Switch Oscar-IV (left), Switch Wild-I**
Above right **Translucent Wesley S-type models**

Above left **Burns Bandit (left), Burns Flyte**
Above right **Burns Flyte headstock**

wall or left in cases, as they really aren't 'guitar-stand-friendly'. The Chinese-built PIY Man O War with the jellyfish inlay, my PIY Thunderbolt in orange burst, and a cream Wesley Warlock all have difficulty with stands, but I adore the colours and the body designs.

"I can just about get away with a stand for my cool Marlin Wizard, which has some fine appointments, like a bound inlaid fingerboard, licensed tremolo system and HSH pickup configuration. It's still angular, but less radical for players who feel inhibited by out-of-control horns.

"Any forms of 'subtlety' were left on the back seat when Silvertone designed the Paul Stanley Apocalypse Special model. Whilst there's no need for a stand, it's no good in the sitting position, as it just slides off your lap, but who is going to play this one sat down? I love this guitar, it just fits within all the flamboyant persona of KISS. It was designed by Paul himself and manufactured in Indonesia. I also have a Silvertone Signature Sovereign with its double-cutaway agathis body and carved arched top. I think this one is maybe a little unusual in the production run with its distinct, flagged trapezoid inlaid position markers. It also features Stanley's trademark mirror scratchplate and his signature engraved on the star tailpiece. Out of the two, this one is my favourite."

There's a sudden change of direction as Judith breaks out a cool 12-string. "It is a bit of a contrast to some of the others I have here," she admits. "It's a semi-acoustic 12-string built by Landola in Finland during the 60s I believe. I could see the beauty within the construction way before I tried it out. There haven't been that many guitar brands from Finland over the years, and I can't find much information on this one, so if anyone out there can help, I'd really appreciate that. I would think the pickups are the company's own design; they sound wonderful – instant Byrds. This one came to me from Mike Japp, ex member of Marmalade.

"I have another Marlin DC-R, which certainly doffs its cap towards PRS, but again, it's an affordable guitar that sounds and plays really well, I think that's really important for the younger players, who can't reach some of the high-end prices. I'm not quite sure what the connection is with the shepherd inlay on the top end of the fingerboard, but it's different. I remember when Marlin launched in the 80s; it was an affordable brand that echoed original iconic designs.

"Older guitars have more character, but for me it's not the age, it's the style, colour and personality"

"Indie Guitars ran for quite a while in the UK, and I really like some of their finishes and alternative designs. I have one of their Union Black models. They were thinking out of the box, as they say, I remember the finish on one of their designs was called an Indie Organix, so called because the top was unfinished. It was just plain wood, and so over a matter of time the owner would apply their own playing persona with age.

"I have an LP-style guitar built by Revelation. The guy behind the company is British guitar luthier Alan Entwistle. The NeoTron pickups really are authentic. I met Alan a few times at his workshop in Bedwas, Wales to see some of his prototypes.

"Older guitars obviously have more character and stories to tell and new guitars will be old one day, but for me it's not the age. It's the style, colour and personality that instantly take me back to that place or era in time to the music they represent."

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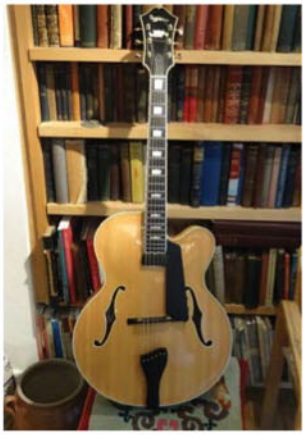

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All about... Telecaster bridge pickups

More than perhaps any other iconic guitar, Fender's Telecaster has two very distinct pickups with different sounds. Next issue, we'll look at the neck unit, but first **HUW PRICE** takes it to the bridge...

When you think about it, Leo Fender didn't really have a sonic reference point for solidbody electric guitars when he was designing the guitar that became known as the Telecaster. All the electrified Gibsons, Epiphones, Gretsches and so forth were essentially hollow-bodied jazz instruments that produced big, mellow and woody tones. Only Paul Bigsby's guitars were true solidbodies.

Leo's personal musical tastes veered towards western swing and country, so his ears would have been naturally attuned to those big old archtops and the tones of pedal steel guitars. When you consider the stock sounds of a vintage-style Telecaster, that's sort of what you get – both sounds in one guitar. The pedal steel-like bridge pickup combines with the dark warmth of the neck pickup, and Fender's early wiring scheme accentuated the contrast.

This was achieved by having two very different pickups installed in a single instrument. Compare the Tele with almost every other classic electric guitar and it's probably unique in that regard. Although most of us have a fairly clear idea of what Teles sound like, the construction of the pickups has changed quite a lot over the years.

In this and the next issue, we'll be taking a close look at vintage-style Tele pickups, and we'll start with the bridge. For the sake of simplicity, I'm going to use the word 'Tele' as a catchall term for the Broadcaster, Esquire, Nocaster and Telecaster, unless otherwise stated.

Lap dogs

Tele bridge pickups are substantially larger than Tele neck pickups – and the Strat pickups that followed. The wire coils are both wider and deeper, and there's the curious issue of the metal base plate. Unlike the neck pickup, which was designed specifically for the Tele, the earliest bridge pickups were adapted from a pickup Fender was already manufacturing for lap steels.

In fact, many old Fender Champion lap steels had their original pickups scavenged after Keith Richards' tech revealed that he had been installing them in his boss's guitars. Until recently, these easy-to-find pickups were an affordable way into vintage Tele tone. Depending on the magnet wire, they ohm out between 5.8k and 8k. The lower DC reading equates to a clear, harmonically rich and trebly tone, while the hotter ones sound more like Broadcaster pickups.

The earliest bridge pickups were adapted from a unit Fender was already manufacturing for lap steels

Telecaster bridge pickups are bigger than their neck counterparts, with wider and deeper wire coils and a distinctive metal base plate. They produce the classic 'Tele' sound – bright, cutting, trebly and a staple of country music tones

The rectangular bottom flats have to be trimmed to fit and a metal baseplate must be attached, but otherwise the specs are almost identical to the bridge pickups on many of the earliest Esquires and Broadcasters. These included 43-gauge wire and alnico 3 slugs that were level with the top of the flatwork. However, the diameter of the guitar pickup slugs was slightly wider.

Metal plate

The metal baseplate made it easy to hang the pickup off a conventional Tele bridge using exposed screw heads for easy height adjustment. The black leadout wire was also soldered to the base plate, which grounded the bridge and obviated the need for a separate bridge ground wire.

The original baseplates were made from steel plated in zinc or copper. These days, you can get plates made from other metals, such as brass and stainless steel, but they have differing effects. Bill Lawrence identified three areas of influence – ferromagnetic functions, electrodynamic functions and shielding. Since the shielding effect is fairly inconsequential, we'll focus on the others.

The ferromagnetic function stabilised and increased the magnetic force of the relatively weak alnico 3 slugs that were available to Fender at the time. Often called an induction plate, the Tele's metal baseplate also

increased the inductance of the coils – much like adding extra windings. The only metal that does this is steel, and increased inductance and magnetic strength combine to make a pickup more powerful.

Steel, copper and brass baseplates all cause eddy current interference. This electrodynamic effect alters the frequency response of a pickup, beefing up the bass and low midrange response to balance out the trebly tone. So copper or brass plates can be used to warm up a Tele bridge pickup without increasing output. If you use steel, you get fatter tone and increased output. Baseplate swapping is a cheap and effective tone tweak, but plates thicker than 1/16" can make a pickup sound muddy.

The DC resistance of the Esquire and Broadcaster bridge pickups can be around 10k ohms

On the wire

Many of the very early lap steel and Broadcaster pickups had plain enamel magnet wire, but this soon changed to heavy formvar. After about a year of production, the magnet wire gauge was changed from 43 AWG to the thicker 42 AWG. The changeover occurred at roughly the same time as Fender adopted the name 'Telecaster'.

This is significant because the thinner wire had allowed Fender to get more turns on the bobbin, so the DC resistance of the earlier Esquire and Broadcaster bridge pickups can be around 10k. Typically, this drops to about 7.8k with the thicker wire. Also consider that thinner wire has higher resistance for an equivalent number of turns, and the coils have lower inductance. The earlier pickups with the thinner wire sound beefier than twangier, brighter Tele pickups – like a Tele with a hint of P-90.

This ties in with the observations of Matt Gleeson from Monty's pickups. He points out that coils of 42 AWG and 43 AWG wound to 10K will sound different. The 42 AWG coil will have higher output, while the 43 AWG coil will have more midrange and compression.

Slug stuff

The next change occurred around 1954, when Fender started using stronger alnico 5 slugs rather than alnico 3. Initially, they were flush with the top but by 1955 they protruded and were staggered like the slugs on the new Stratocaster pickups. This was the bright, cutting, twangy pickup that became synonymous with country picking.

With modern strings, they can sound edgy, but when they were introduced most players used warm-sounding nickel strings with round cores and a wound G. If you want to tame your Tele's treble, you could use the same, but the wound G is optional.

Post-CBS

Nothing much changed until around 1964, when Fender stopped using black flats on the bottom of the pickup and changed to grey. Around the same time, the company swapped from formvar to plain enamel magnet wire.

By the late 60s, Fender was dipping the pickups in lacquer to solidify the coils rather than wax potting. Since lacquer sets much harder than wax, this can result in coils that are very solid on the outside but loose inside. Pickups from this era can sound very lively and sensitive, but they can be prone to squealing.

By the late 70s, players were using higher gain and volume levels, which caused serious problems with excessively microphonic pickups. You can sometimes cure microphony issues by ensuring the plate is fixed firmly to the pickup's base and by using surgical tubing spacers rather than metal springs with the height adjustment screws. Instead, Fender chose to stop using baseplates altogether on some models – and those guitars sound less Tele-like as a result.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Bear in mind that all the tech specs and dates given in this article are approximate and there would have been inconsistencies. Since this article is all about vintage Tele-style bridge pickups, you won't find any stacked humbuckers or tapped coils in this selection. Instead, here's a handful of bridge pickups that cover every incarnation from the prototypes to the CBS takeover.

SEYMOUR DUNCAN ANTIQUITY 1950 LAP STEEL £50 (APPROX)

Wound to 9k with flat alnico 2 slugs, this is a reproduction of the lap steel pickups Fender made during the late 1940s. Since it's from the Antiquity range, these are convincingly relic'd too. So if you fancy a go at trimming the bottom and adding your own metal plate, here's a good place to start.

THE CREAMERY CLASSIC '67 £69

Hand-made in Manchester, this pickup features late-60s spec staggered alnico 5 slugs, a copper-plated steel plate and an aged white string wrap around the coil. It's scatterwound with 42 AWG plain enamel wire to 6.4k with south-up magnet polarity.

MONTY'S RETRO WIND TELE £87

This pickup promises lively touch responsiveness for clean country and blues rock. It's scatterwound to 6.6k with 42 AWG wire and has flat alnico 3 magnets for open tone with sweeter treble response than typical Teles. It's not relic'd, but the materials and cloth-covered wire are vintage correct.

SHED ESQUIRE £75

A marvel from Wales, this pickup is made with 43 AWG magnet wire, aged alnico 5 magnets and has a zinc-plated baseplate. The pickup is dipped in black wax after wax potting, then the lacquered bobbin top is aged, along with the vintage-correct slot head mounting screws, surgical tubing and baseplate.

Chord Clinic

Remove the third from your chords and you get the appropriately named powerchord, a staple of rock, punk and pop music. **ROD FOGG** shows you how to beef up your playing using only two notes...

Previous Chord Clinics have tended to concentrate on adding notes to chords (such as sevenths, ninths and elevenths) or altering the notes in a chord (such as sus2 or sus4). This month, we are going to take a look at what happens when you take a note away from the basic three-note triad.

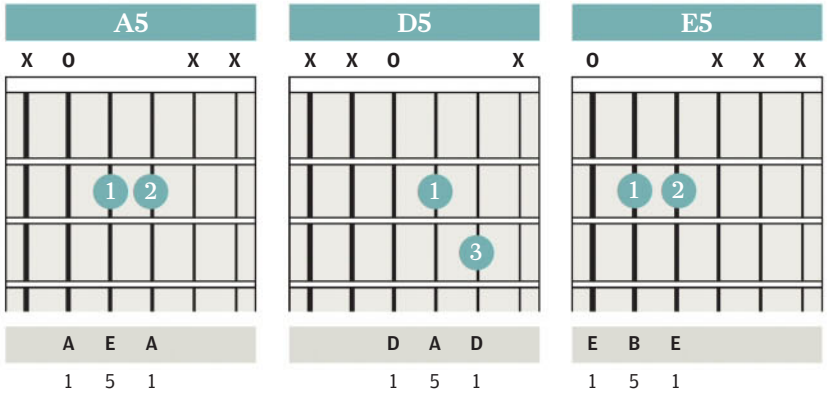
There is only one candidate for removal – the third. If you remove the fifth, you're left with a root and a third, which doesn't sound all that different from the full triad. If you remove the root, you're still left with what sounds like a chord, except the third now sounds like the root. Take away the third, however, and you are left with a bare fifth, which can sound more effective than major and minor chords, particularly when you have the amp cranked and there's some distortion.

Distortion causes each note you play to generate prominent overtones – that's why it sounds so fat. If you keep the third in the chord, the overtones from all three notes can end up as a pile of mush, in conflict with each other. So things sound clearer but heavier if you leave out the third. Chords that contain just the root and the fifth are known as 5 chords, fifth chords, 5th chords or powerchords; it's probably best to call them five chords. Technically, they are diads (two notes) not triads (three notes), and some people argue that they are an interval (perfect fifth) and not really chords at all because they don't have that root-third-fifth structure. But it seems to me that in rock music they function in the same way as chords – and that's what we'll call them here.

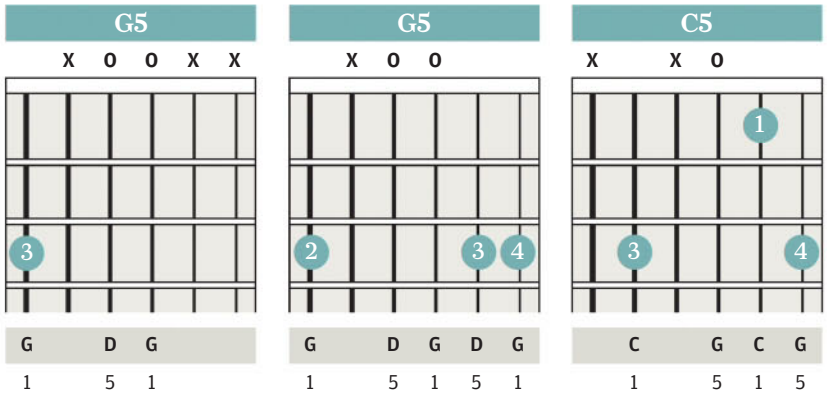
Take a look at figure 1, which introduces A5, D5 and E5. Hold on, you might be thinking, these are three-note chords. Well, the fattest five chords happen when you double the root note an octave up, giving you the root, perfect fifth and octave. One thing with most five-chord shapes is that you will need to do some damping to avoid sounding all those unwanted open strings. Wrapping the thumb over to touch the bass strings is useful for A5 and D5; it also helps if you don't go too wild with the pick, aiming to pick just the three notes of each chord.

These chords sound good in the order here, but you could also try E5, D5 then A5, and if you get the rhythm right it might sound similar to AC/CD's *Back In Black*. Add a descending blues scale riff to take it further.

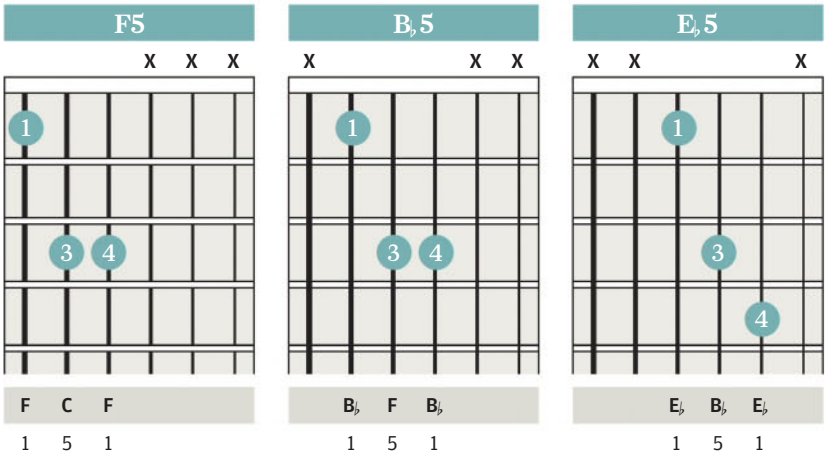
AD/ED (Fig 1)



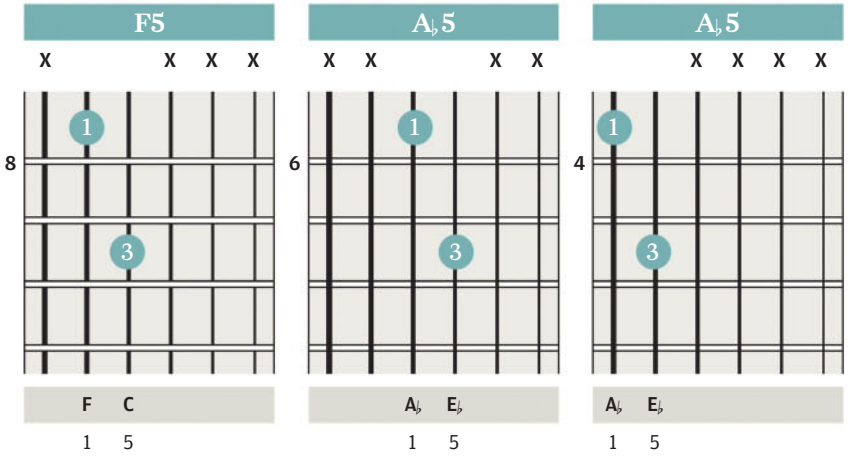
Ziggy played G5 (Fig 2)



Smells like F5 and B♭5 (Fig 3)



Song 2-note (Fig 4)



In figure 2, the three-note G5 chord includes a muted A string. Try starting on A5 for some Van Halen-style rhythm parts. The second chord shows that you can also stack up the roots and fifths to produce a five-note G5 chord. For the sake of completeness, we've included a stacked-up C5 as well, although G5 also sounds good followed by Cadd9, keeping the same top two notes. You could also experiment with G5, followed by D and Dsus4, wiggling your little finger on and off as you strum. Then play some slash chords (see last month's lesson): C, C/B, C/A and round again. Ziggy, as Mr Bowie pointed out, played guitar...

One of the coolest things about five chords is the ease with which they can be moved around the guitar. The chords in figure 3 are movable – they include no open strings and each shape can be moved and played at every fret. You can slide them around to your heart's content and invent your own five-chord riffs, but to name them it's best to recognise where the root note of each chord is and then familiarise yourself with the names of the notes on that string.

So, basically, F5 is the E5 shape moved up one fret. Continuing up one fret at a time from there would give you F#5, G5, G#5, A5 and so on, until you reach E5 again at the 12th fret. B♭5 is the same as A5, moved up one fret. Carrying on fret by fret will give you B5, C5, C#5, D5 and so on, until you reach A5 again at the 12th fret. Knowing your chromatic scale is clearly useful with these and other movable chords. Just remember, there is a sharp between every note – except between B and C, and E and F. For theoretical reasons related to key, we often use flats instead of sharps. F# is the same as G♭, G# is the same as A♭ and so on...

Try sliding the F5 chord up two frets to G5 for The Kinks' *You Really Got Me*, or keep the F5 and B♭5 and slide up to A♭5 and D♭5 at the fourth fret for something akin to *Smells Like Teen Spirit* by Nirvana. There are hundreds of bands who have made use of this type of chord on thousands of songs, from pop to rock to metal to... well, maybe not jazz funk but you get the idea. The E♭5 chord shows that the D5 from figure 1 also makes a movable shape, albeit somewhat high in pitch.

You don't have to add that extra root note at the top of a five chord. You really can play just the root and the fifth, and when it comes to sliding chords around this can make things much easier. The first two chords in figure 4 were used in a different order to make Blur's *Song 2*, which has one of the best guitar riffs of all time. The recorded version, at least for the intro and verses, demonstrates that you don't have to use distortion when playing five chords. Playing in this style, though, is harder than it might seem; accurate picking and left-hand damping are essential.

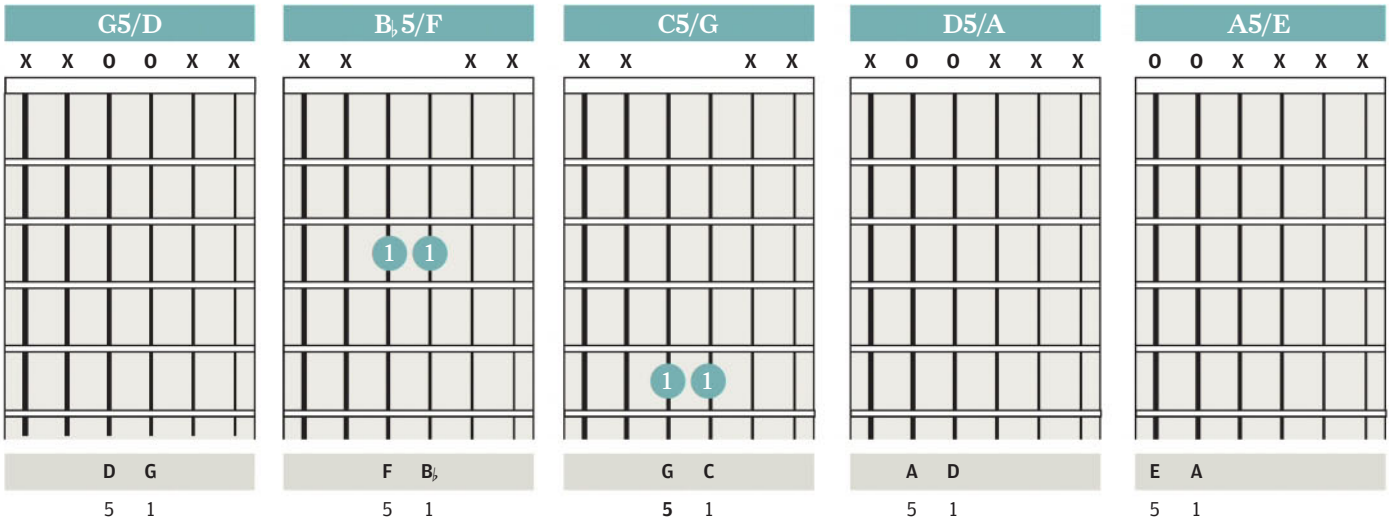
Turn a fifth upside down and you get a fourth, which coincidentally happens to be the interval between most of the guitar's strings. You have heard this interval if you've ever listened to the intro to Deep Purple's *Smoke On The Water*. Because we don't generally recognise there being such a chord as D4 or A4 (though personally I think that would be just fine), we have to say G5/D, or D5/A, meaning G5 with D in the bass, or D5 with A bass. As you can see from the first three chords, these can be moved around, too. Play them by flattening your first finger >

across two strings. The other shapes in the example show that these chords are playable on other pairs of strings too.

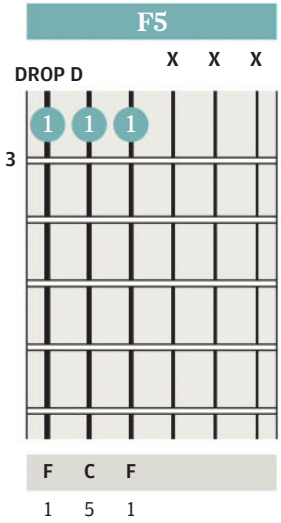
We end with a new departure for Chord Clinic – drop D tuning. Grab the tuning peg for your low E string and sound the note at the same time as your open D string. Around a quarter or half a turn down and they should be an octave apart. You could also use a guitar tuner. The great thing about drop D tuning is that you can play a five chord using just one finger, and the lower pitch makes it sound even heavier.

Just remember to recalibrate your brain to the change of notes on your E string. F5, for example, is now at the third fret and E♭5 is at the first fret. A♭5, B♭5 and C5 played in this way (6th, 8th and 10th frets) sounds similar to the heavier "woo hoo" section in *Song 2*. Crank it up!

Inverted (Fig 5)



The one-finger chord (Fig 6)



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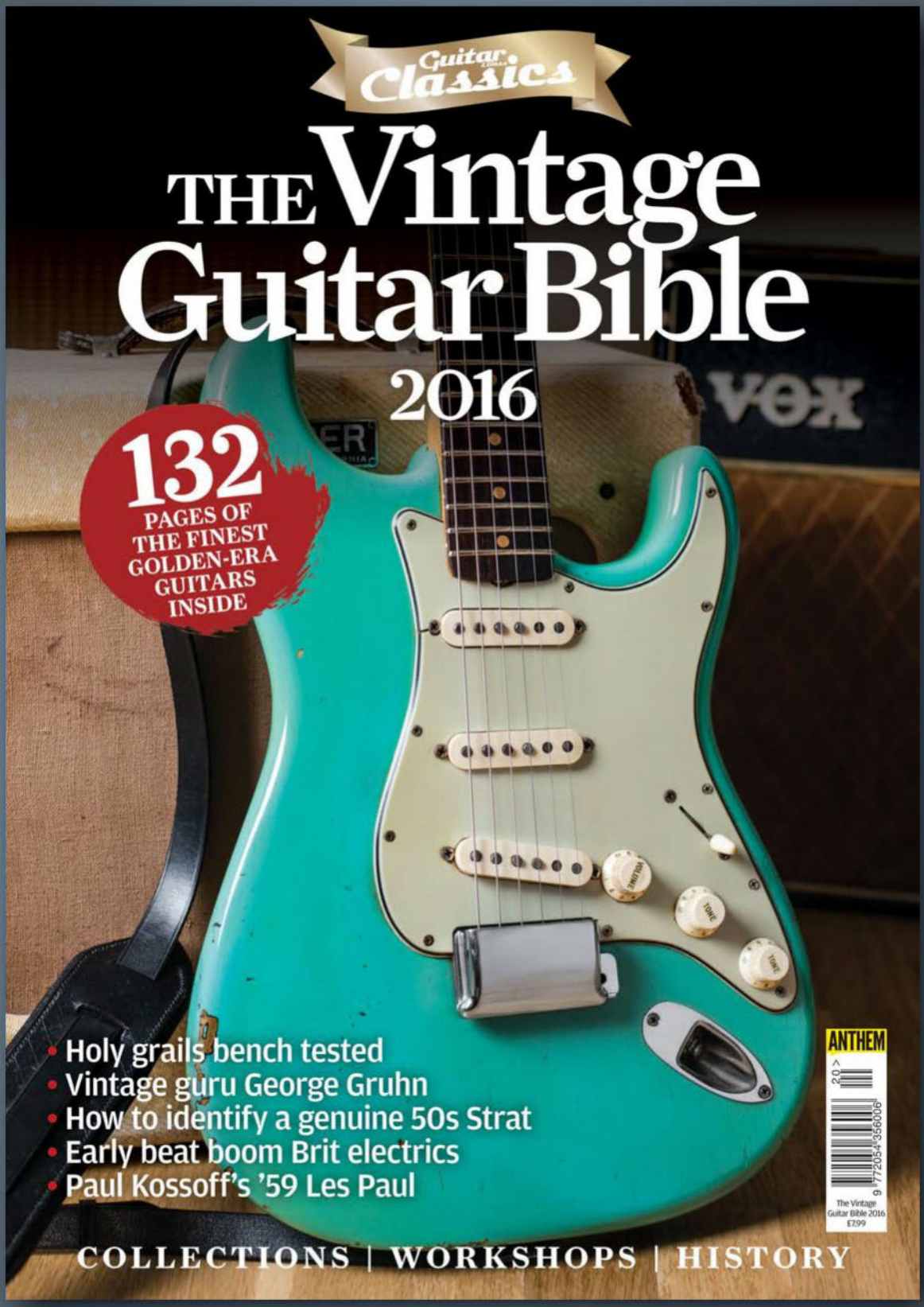

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: Chord Clinic appreciation, a plea for tweed advice and taking inspiration from Zematis...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Striking a Chord

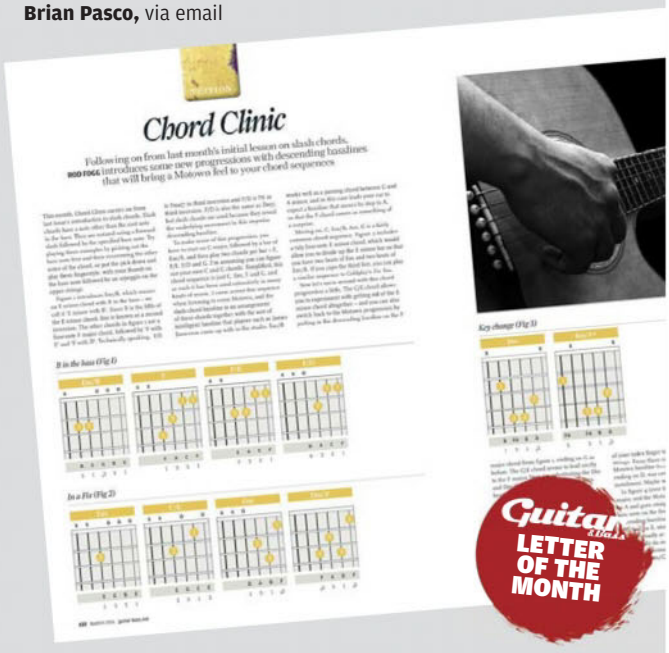
I have been a reader of your excellent mag since Vol 1, No 2. I confess that the main items of appeal to me are the unbiased reviews, the interviews and the Private Collection feature.

As an ageing guitar player (all styles, plus mandolin) with a clear 50 years' playing experience, I am lazy and have relied on having a good ear and doing lots of practice. Consequently, I always steer away from tuition articles in any guitar mag.

Rod Fogg's Chord Clinic has changed all that! My poor theory knowledge and reluctance to fill the ever-present gaps in my knowledge have at last succumbed to this excellent and inspiring series of articles. It is so relevant to all aspects of guitar playing and is presented in a way that starts off being purely interesting and ends up being absolutely essential. Issue number 4 fell through the letterbox, and I admit that I went straight to the Chord Clinic, when I would normally go through the reviews!

Well done, Rod, for your excellent, well-researched and inspiring writing – keep them coming! I readily admit that your articles are adding a new dimension to my playing, and are opening a door for me to want to learn and understand more on a daily basis. I'm sure my bandmates believe I'm having a late mid-life crisis as I tell them to maybe try a major seventh here and there! Thank you!

Brian Pasco, via email



WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Tweed needs

Hi guys, I wonder if you could help me out? I'm sorted for the big, heavy amps. I've got Marshall and Blackstar half stacks and HT-1 and Laney Tony Iommi combos for when I want to rock out at household volumes. I've got my pedalboard with a range of boxes that delight. I've got the guitars I need but, obviously, being a guitarist, there's more that I want...

Now, I've got a hankering for a Fender tweed amp and am clueless as to where to start. According to the websites I've scoured, the whole range profess to have "that Fender sound", but they all have different valves, controls, speakers, etc. What I'm after is an authentic tweed sound (despite the ISF, I can't dial this in on the Blackstars however I try) at 'man cave' volumes. My heart says just suck it up and buy a Twin, but my head says that will be loud enough to take the walls down. I'm guessing somewhere in the one-to-10-watt range is what I'm looking at (I'd like to rock out so that the valves are cooking on occasion), that gives me the classic cleans and break-up at a sensible volume.

Whilst a Fender would be appropriate, I'm not hung up on it having to be. I'd be happy to look at vintage if there's something in their back catalogue that would suit.

So, *G&B* guitar maestros, what would you recommend?

Thanks in advance,

Paul Lacey, Newcastle

***G&B* Huw Price writes: Hi Paul. 'tweed sound' has become a bit of a byword for a particular type of tone. For most of us, it means old-school overdrive with fat mids, slightly loose lows and clear treble that falls somewhat shy of the glassiness you can get with later Fender designs.**

The thing is that there is no 'tweed sound' as such, because Fender used loads of different valves, speaker configurations and circuit designs throughout the 1950s. You can go from low-wattage Champs with a single volume control to full-on fire-breathing Bassmans and high-powered Twins with fully featured TMB tone controls and presence. They sound worlds apart.

You should be warned that even 4-watt tweed champs are pretty loud. OK, they won't shake out the windows, but you can't crank them up at night if you have tetchy neighbours or kids asleep upstairs. What we'd suggest is getting a medium-powered tweed and an attenuator. That way, you can get tweed and high-gain overdrive tones at the 'man cave'

levels you describe and you would have another giggable amp, too. Also, investigate tweed amps with power scaling.

Smaller tweeds based on the Champ, Princeton and Harvard models all have their charms, but they can sound a bit boxy. If you want tweed tone, you can't go far wrong with a 5E3-style Deluxe, and there are plenty of clones out there. Many, such as the Lazy J J20, Seeleys, Gartone Bluesman and the Rift Tweed 15, are made here in the UK. You'll pay more for USA-made tweeds from the likes of Fender, Clark and Victoria – they'll probably end up costing you more once you have paid import duty.

Remember, tweed covering is no guarantee of 'tweed tone'. If you can live without the luggage look, consider the Carr Skylark or the Tone King Falcon Grande. Both are based on tweed circuits, plus they have reverb and built-in attenuators. The Rift PT20 is another tweedy-sounding amp with reverb and tremolo and almost instantaneous overdrive.

Home-made Zemaitis

Hi *Guitar & Bass*, I've just finished making a guitar for myself inspired by your article on Zemaitis guitars. I have always loved them, but can never afford them.

I took a bitsa T-type, planed down the top and weight-relieved the body before fitting a 3mm aluminium plate on top. The engraving was done by hand with a Dremel (about 20-25 hours) and finished with black paint rubbed into the lines. One Bigsby, one Schaller roller bridge and two old Gibson humbuckers later, I was finished. The shotgun cartridges came from Fleabay and were glued on top of cut-down knobs. They are push/pull for coil-tapping. I put my signature on the headstock plate.

I hope you like it. I loved the Johan Gustavsson you reviewed, but that is way beyond my talents. Thanks,

Brian Curtis, Harlequin Design

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us via snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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NEXT ISSUE

Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Twin Peaks!

The history of Fender's most formidable amplifier examined

PLUS! Even more of Joe Bonamassa's amazing collection

INTERVIEWS

• JD Simo • Kerry King •
• Wilko Johnson • Daughter •

REVIEWED

Gibson Memphis 1958 ES-335 under the microscope and much, much more...

VOL 27 NO 8
ON SALE
01 APRIL

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

The Last Shadow Puppets

EVERYTHING YOU'VE COME TO EXPECT

The sophomore album by The Last Shadow Puppets marks a departure from their debut – an extended homage to baroque 1960s pop. *EYCTE* steps out of the shadow of Scott Walker, favouring a more contemporary interpretation of the genre that echoes, appropriately, *Humbug*-era Arctic Monkeys. The sweeping string arrangements remain, but are deployed with more subtlety. Fuzzy, effected guitars and the twin vocals of Alex Turner and Miles Kane take centre stage, supported by acoustic guitar, organ and the modest rhythm section. Wiry lead lines and sinister atmospherics are prominent throughout, with highlights being the title track (think the Beach Boys circa *Surf's Up*), the aggressive funky riffing of *The Element Of Surprise* and dark Beatles pastiche *She Does The Woods*. An engaging effort. **TS**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Arctic Monkeys, Scott Walker*

Cheap Trick

BANG, ZOOM, CRAZY... HELLO

Rockford, Illinois' finest return with their first album in seven years, and it's a nostalgia-provoking delight. The recent Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees pull no punches on *Bang, Zoom, Crazy... Hello*. Filled with energetic guitar wizardry provided by the great Rick Nielsen, this album is a frenetic affair from the first notes of the opening track. Songs such as *No Direction* and *Blood Red Lips* provide the bucketloads of charismatic charm you'd expect from a Cheap Trick album, filled as they are with glistening harmonies and hooky chourses. Since their formation in 1973, Cheap Trick have played over 5,000 gigs and been through numerous line-up changes but listening to this, their 17th studio release, is a timeless experience that transports the listener instantly back to the band's golden mid-70s period. **TT**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Free, REO Speedwagon*

Jeff Healey

HEAL

This album of 12 previously unavailable tracks is released to coincide with what would've been the Canadian guitarist's 50th birthday, and underlines just how profound a loss the guitar world suffered when Healey sadly succumbed to cancer back in 2008, at the age of just 41. Though he was an enormously gifted and wide-ranging player with a pedigree primarily in the realms of blues and jazz, the songs included here represent the rock and AOR side of his output. Aside from the undoubted quality of the material on display, it's worth listening to *Heal* purely for the thorough masterclass it provides in seamless guitar-vocal Q&A, great timing and the art of bringing a guitar solo to life with tremendous physicality – all of which were deep-rooted elements of Healey's inimitable style. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *SRV, Philip Sayce*

Primal Scream

CHAOSMOSIS

Primal Scream have always had the ability to provoke reaction, and *Chaosmosis* will certainly divide opinion. *Trippin' On Your Love* feels like a weak Happy Mondays pastiche, while *Demon Again* – one of the high points – and *100% Or Nothing* owe a debt to New Order. Over-polished production, breezy lyrics and cringey backing vocals combine on what is the Scream's least creatively sharp effort in years. **GW**

5/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *New Order, Happy Mondays*

Textures

PHENOTYPE

After 2011's *Dualism*, Textures have kept fans waiting for their fifth album. Lovers of progressive metal will be relieved to know that *Phenotype* has been worth the wait. It contains elements of progressive rock, death metal, Djent and haunting pianos. The band's technical ability is on show throughout, though never to the detriment of the songs on what is a progressive, heavy and very well produced album. **GB**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Dream Theater, Opeth*

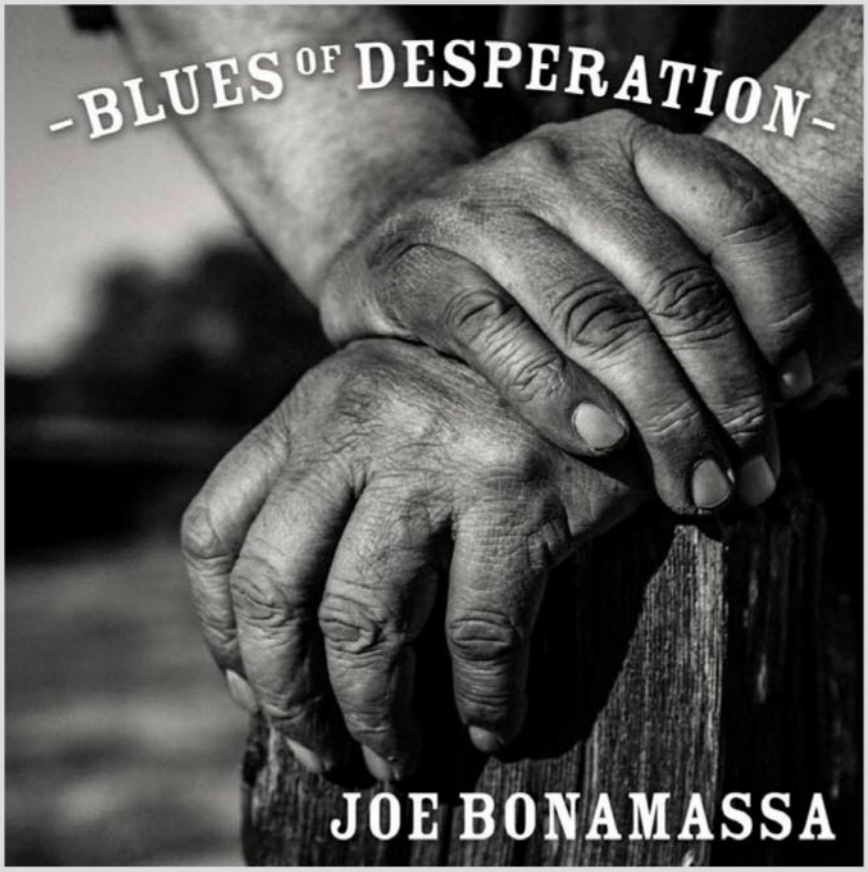
Matt Woosey

DESIDERATA

Album eight finds Matt Woosey in eclectic mood as the singer-songwriter tiptoes through blues, folk and trip-hop in enchanting fashion. On *Always Be The One*, Woosey turns his hand to lap steel, while *Million Miles* showcases some marvellous bluesy soloing. There's refined fingerstyle playing and airy vocals throughout from a gifted songwriter and versatile guitarist. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *John Butler, Newton Faulkner*



FEATURED ALBUM

Joe Bonamassa
BLUES OF DESPERATION

This is Joe Bonamassa's 12th solo album since his debut at the turn of the millennium, and his longtime producer Kevin Shirley hired two drummers – Anton Fig and Greg Morrow – for the sessions to "ruffle Joe's feathers". The 11 tracks, laid down in five days in Nashville, have the feel of the live environment in which Joe thrives, and the extra rhythmic elements seem to have enabled everyone to relax and leave more space in the arrangements.

The title track exemplifies that approach best, with its quiet-loud dynamic and explosive main riff. Not that this is the only trick up Joe's sleeve – his fans have come to expect the unexpected by now – and he shows his usual effortless versatility and chameleonic guitar personality throughout.

Opener *This Train* is a hurtling up-tempo blues-rocker with a greasy doublestop-laden solo and flourishes of piano; next up, *Mountain Climbing* has the album's stand-out riff, which lands like a Zepp-esque hammer from Joe's Firebird before showcasing Kossoff-esque vibrato on its soaring melodic solo interlude. *Then Drive* swerves into what could actually be a Mark Knopfler composition, punctuated by pent-up, beautifully articulated lead playing, reminiscent in places of Bowie-era SRV.

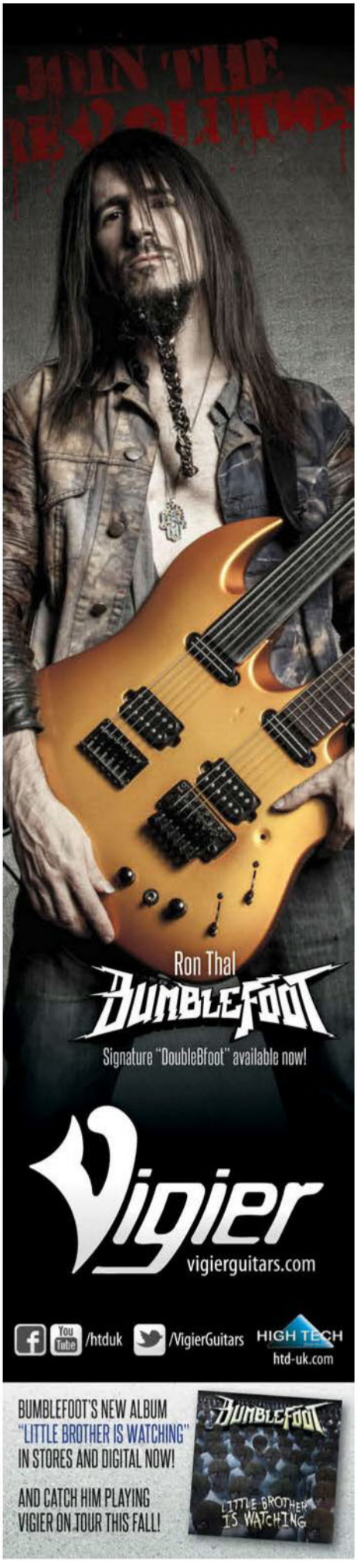
No Good Place For The Lonely keeps the listener on their toes with an unusual glissandoing main riff and a superbly emotive bluesy solo that channels echoes of Jimmy Page, Gary Moore, SRV and Buddy Guy. It's one of Bonamassa's most fiery and expressive solos in years, and is followed by the atmospheric title track with its doses of delayed theremin and slide.

After this double whammy, the album tails off a little in intensity, though there are some intriguing detours on the way to closing slow-blues workout *What I've Known For A Very Long Time*. One is *The Valley Runs Low*, a 70s-era Clapton-esque ballad intersecting somewhere between soul and country, which benefits from the addition of lilting harmonies from Mahalia Barnes, Jade McRae and Juanita Tippins, whose talents are sprinkled throughout the album; another is *You Left Me Nothin' But The Bill And The Blues* – a shuffling R&B number studded with wound-up-tight stabs of fiery lead through a stinging 'in-between' Stratty sound.

So *Blues Of Desperation* isn't, as the title suggests, a heartbroken, introspective tour of the Delta. Bonamassa's at his best in the record's feisty, at times angry, hard-edged rock mode, though there are plenty of interludes that show the blues-rock kingpin is still determined to push boundaries. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Led Zeppelin, Gary Moore*



CHRIS ROBERTSON

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

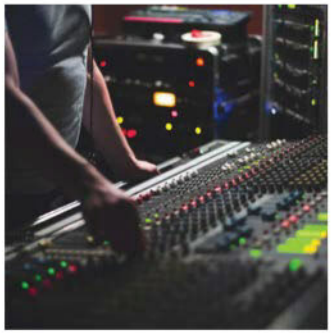
The frontman of Kentucky hard rockers Black Stone Cherry holds court

Eleanor Jane

1 I couldn't live without my...
"My PRS Original Sewell amp heads. I've got one here and one in the States. Paul had actually taken them home and modded them himself; he gave me two of his, which was amazing. They had his handwriting on them where he'd marked the settings. Those amps are the ticket to the whole sound of my rig."

2 In another life I would be...
"My wife's a nurse but there ain't no way I could do that. I'd be a stay-at-home dad! But, honestly, if I wasn't a musician I'd have to be working at a studio, engineering or something. I'd have to do something with music."

3 The moment that started it all...
"The first song I ever remember hearing was *That Smell* by Skynyrd when I was four. For a guitar band, you don't get a lot better than Skynyrd. The last line-up before the plane crash was amazing. But the reason I play guitar is because of my dad, and my grandfather. He built instruments by hand."



4 The one that got away...
"I sold one guitar to make ends meet; we'd hit some hard times on the road, it was a Les Paul Custom with a peace sign on it that was hand-painted. But the one that really gets me, my grandfather passed away recently and when I was just starting out he gave me a 1966 Fender Bassman head and the 2x12 matching cabinet. The head got stolen and I'll never see it again..."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"I've said the wrong city a time or two... it happens!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Just be humble, man. Never take it for granted and always be humble. It's not about us. We have fun, but it's about making sure the crowd have a good time."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"Everything we play is just about in Drop D, for the most part. Open G we use sometimes, and some other tunings, but if I just pick up a guitar I normally play in A; I just play some blues stuff, I guess cause that's where I come from, man."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Monster energy drink. They've got this drink, Rehab, it's so good..."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"My iPod is full of guilty pleasures! It ranges from Son House to Lamb Of God to Justin Timberlake."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"There's a player whose knowledge I'd give anything for – Ian Thornley; he has a band called Big Wreck. I don't know how the world doesn't know this guy."

Black Stone Cherry's new album Kentucky is released on 1 April

Lynyrd Skynyrd: the band who started it all for Chris
Getty Images

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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